

BBC

JANUARY 2015

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to enjoy this year

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BEAVER CLASH

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or should they go?



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Ellie Harrison talks about her big plans for her smallholding on page 36

Looking forward



“Taking stock at New Year, the rural dream, with its promise of beautiful countryside, growing your own veg and keeping animals, is seductive. In January 2012, my wife and I viewed a remote cottage in Monmouthshire: by June we were living there – our lives changed in six short months.

This month, *Countryfile*'s Ellie Harrison tells us about her plans for five acres of neglected Cotswold orchard. As viewers of the programme will know, Ellie loves wildlife, so her first task was to encourage more to take up residence. Her trials and triumphs are on page 36.

One species hoping for a happy 2015 is the wild beaver. Extinct in Britain for the past 400 years, the origin of its recent reappearance is unknown. As the Government decides whether the beaver colonies should be removed, I went to see some on Devon's River Otter and talked to the local Wildlife Trust about why they want them to stay (page 44).

January can be a cold and sullen month – a good time to plan an escape, perhaps to the tropical-looking Isles of Scilly, where each island has its own character and all are beautiful (page 18). It's a tranquil place with few cars and empty beaches, where you can fritter away time without fear of wasting it.

Finally, this month we launch the *BBC Countryfile Magazine Awards*, looking for the best of rural Britain across 12 categories – and we need your votes. Read about it on page 63. Happy voting and a very Happy New Year.

Fergus

Fergus Collins, editor@countryfile.com

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THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Hayley Spurway

"By day, the air is filled with birdsong and the phut-phut of boats. By night, the skies glitter with stars," says Hayley of the Isles of Scilly, **page 18**



Tristan Gooley

Our landscape detective says "every single thing we see – hill, animal, even puddle – is a clue to something interesting," **page 30**



James Witts

"You discover more about yourself, and the country you live in, by running," asserts our high-octane correspondent, **page 58**

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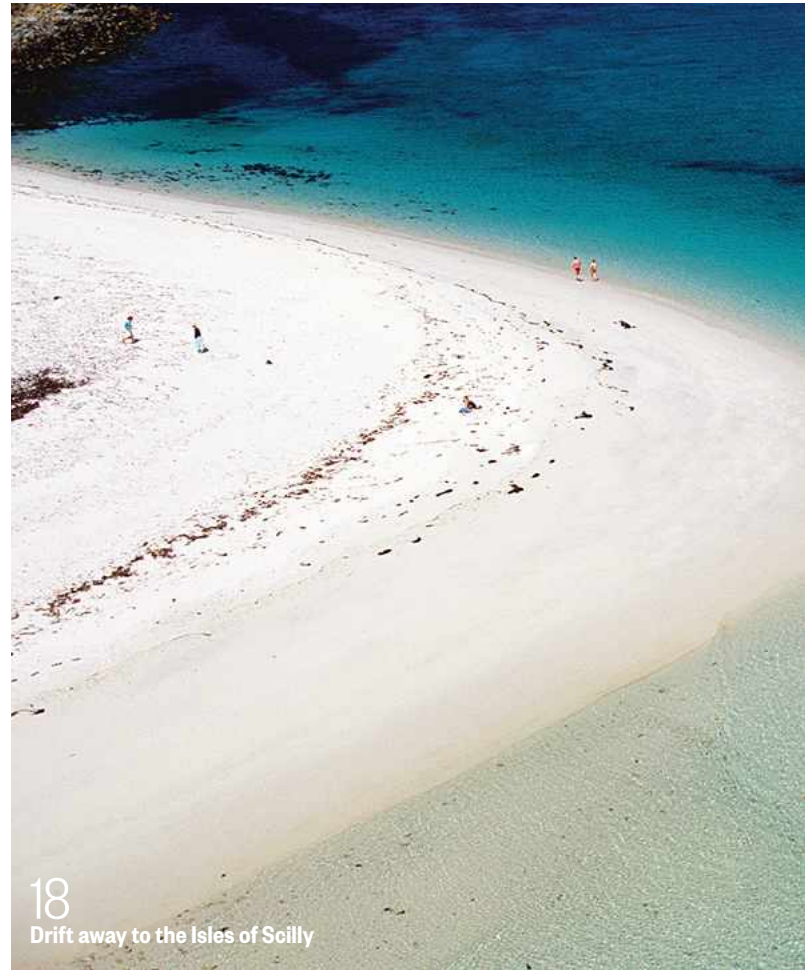
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It's voting time – have your say in our annual awards.

- 12 categories: from best rural pub to greatest heritage site.
- Shortlist chosen by experts in each field.
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JANUARY IN THE COUNTRY

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January view

VIKING FIRE IN MIDWINTER

For 24 hours in cold, dead January, Shetland drives back the darkness with a great fiery celebration – Up Helly Aa – that culminates with the launch and burning of a Viking longship.

For 500 years, Shetland was part of the Viking empire and Norse traditions still hold sway, particularly a love of spirited celebrations. Up Helly Aa is a late-19th century invention to channel some of the wilder elements of these stirring gatherings.

Some 5,000 spectators, many marching in full Viking battle gear and carrying flaming brands, join the parade. As the ship is launched, 1,000 torches are hurled aboard and the work of months is quickly engulfed in flames. The crowd sings Viking songs and the partying continues long into the next day.

Photo Getty



▲ WINTER WALKING

A quiet track runs through a peaceful Pennine moorland on the edge of Halifax in West Yorkshire. This is Norland Moor, a local nature reserve famed for its blaze of heather in early autumn but also an excellent place to spot red grouse in winter. Best of all, it's an essential breathing place for the busy city in the valley below.

➤ NEW YEAR'S DIP

For the Serpentine Swimming Club, New Year is a chance for a bracing swim in this well-loved lake in London's Hyde Park. It won't be the club's first winter swim, though. Since 1864, members have been taking to the icy water on Christmas morning, racing for the Peter Pan cup. New Year sea swimming is also on the rise. Last year at Saundersfoot on the Carmarthenshire coast, a giant firework was the signal for 1,357 people to rush into the January waves. This year's theme is WW1.

www.saundersfootnyds.co.uk/page17.html



We want to see your snaps

Send your countryside images to

photos@countryfile.com or the address on page 3

WAXWING INVASION

No one knows for sure if or when waxwings will invade this winter. But when they are forced from their Scandinavian and Siberian strongholds by bad weather or lack of food, they often descend on city or suburban streets. Here, flocks of these peach-coloured birds settle on berry-bearing trees such as rowans and hawthorns, and tuck in while emitting short, silvery trills. Look for news of their arrival on birding sites such as the BTO's Birdtrack (www.bto.org/birdtrack) or follow the Twitter account [@waxwingsuk](https://twitter.com/waxwingsuk)



Anniversary:

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Food rationing began 75 years ago this month, on 8 January 1940 – four months after the outbreak of the Second World War. Prior to that, Britain had imported over two thirds of its food supply. As enemy ships targeted incoming merchant vessels, supplies became scarce. The Ministry of Food issued ration books to every person.

A typical weekly allowance for one person included one fresh egg, 4oz margarine and bacon, 2oz butter and tea, 1oz cheese and 8oz sugar. Cheaper cuts of meat became more popular as they required fewer tokens.

The Dig for Victory campaign encouraged citizens to be self-sufficient and grow their own vegetables. Many used their gardens and the numbers of allotments soared. Pigs, rabbits and chickens were reared for meat, and a bartering system sprang up.

On this day



landscape to explore

HILL FIGURES by Ian Vince

The hillside white horse is a common motif on Britain's chalk, but all kinds of figures adorn our hills from human forms and military badges to fabulous creatures – even where there is no chalk at all. We've corralled a few of them here.



UFFINGTON

While many white horses are of Georgian or later origin, the Uffington White Horse may be 3,000 years old and is altogether wilder and more abstract. Some believe it's actually a dragon and, indeed, you'll find Dragon Hill nearby.



GIANTS

The infamously lewd Cerne Abbas Giant (Dorset) is ripe in one sense but isn't particularly old – no account of it can be found before 1694 and it seems that it might have been erected (ahem) for the purpose of political satire.



WHITE HORSE AND STAG

Britain's most northerly hill figures are on Mormond Hill, Aberdeenshire. Far from the chalk, this horse and stag were made from chunks of white quartz in the 1790s and 1870 respectively and are Scotland's only historic geoglyphs.



Haxey Hood

Lincolnshire, 6 January

This tradition began in the 14th century when the wind blew off Lady de Mowbray's silk hood, which was returned to her by a quick farm worker. This chase is re-enacted every year, and has evolved into a rugby-like game. The aim is to get the hood to one of four pubs in the town. The winning landlord proudly displays the hood above the bar until the next year's competition.

Did you know?



In the Gwaun Valley, Pembrokeshire folk ring in the New Year on 13 January

... rather than 1 January, following the older Julian calendar. Children sing to receive their 'Calennig', or New Year gifts (usually sweets, fruit and money).

how to...

PLANT A TREE FOR WILDLIFE

Plant the right small tree or shrub this winter and, by next year, visiting birds will be feeding off its fruit by Joe Pontin



1 If you are planting on a lawn, start by stripping the turf to at least 50cm from the base of the tree.



2 Dig a hole at least three times the width of – and only as deep as – the container (or rootball, if planting a bare-rooted specimen).



3 Using a fork, loosen the soil at the bottom and sides of the hole to help roots to grow out.



4 Drive in a tree stake at an angle of 45°. It should meet the stem at 1/3 of its height, with a 3cm gap between tree and stake. Use a rubberised tree tie to attach, tacked to the stake.



5 Backfill, firming soil in well. Soak well – using 2-3 cans of water – and mulch exposed soil with compost or well-rotted horse manure. Visit www.rspb.org.uk.

5 trees for birds

Some of the best species of trees and shrubs for birds:

Guellder rose

Viburnum opulus

Dogwood

Cornus sanguinea

Hawthorn

Crataegus monogyna

Holly

Ilex aquifolium

Rowan

Sorbus aucuparia



Saturnal Real Ale Ramble

Llanwrtyd Wells, 10 January

The Romans knew how to inject fun into their winter. Saturnalia was a major annual festival centred around merrymaking. Slaves were temporarily released and reversed roles with their masters, taking part in parties and games. The good folk of Welsh town Llanwrtyd Wells are continuing the spirit, holding a beer festival with a warming range of winter ales at the Neuadd Arms in the town centre. Clear those fuggy heads the next day with a series of walks that follow ancient Roman roads nearby.



Adam Henson

THE COUNTRY'S FAVOURITE FARMER GIVES US HIS MONTHLY FIELD GUIDE TO AGRICULTURE IN BRITAIN

PLOUGH MONDAY

*'Come, all you jolly ploughmen, of courage stout and bold,
That labour all the winter in stormy winds, and cold;
To clothe the fields with plenty, your farm-yards to renew,
To crown them with contentment, behold the painful plough'*

These words are from an old song called 'The Painful Plough', which captured the hardship of agricultural workers in years gone by. It was often sung on Plough Monday, the first Monday after Twelfth Night. From the Middle Ages onwards it traditionally marked the beginning of the ploughing season and therefore the official start of the agricultural year. Plough Monday was the day that farm labourers were expected to return to work after their Christmas rest. But the cold weather, lack of wages and difficult conditions in the fields meant that young workers (or plough boys) were more enthusiastic about raising money and boosting their spirits. Certainly by the 1700s it was common for them to drag ploughs through the parish and ask local people for a hand out. In true English folklore fashion, the custom developed differently from place to place; some village processions featured a 'fool' and musical instruments, most performed songs and dances and a few even included sword dancing. As time went on, the ploughs were decorated with sheaves of corn, ribbons and ropes.

People who didn't offer money were faced with forfeits such as having their gardens and paths ploughed up. Over the centuries the church has played an important role in the lives of many country dwellers, so the day before Plough Monday continues to be called Plough Sunday.

In the past 20 years, special services have become popular in rural areas once again, featuring hymns, prayers and the blessing of a plough, which is brought in to the church. Plough Monday events have returned to rural communities all over England, especially in the Midlands and the East. There's also renewed interest in a savoury treat called Plough pudding. It is a Norfolk delicacy made of sausage meat, chopped bacon and onion topped with suet pastry.



Plough Monday activities:

PLOUGH LIGHTS were simply candles that were lit in local churches to mark Plough Monday and bring blessings on farm workers. It's not known when the tradition began but records of candles placed in windows go back as far as the 15th century. They were outlawed by King Henry VIII.

PLOUGH PLAYS or 'wooing plays' were performed by plough boys as they made their way around local houses and farms. They entertained onlookers with songs telling the story of a 'farmer's man' who tries and fails to attract the attention of a character called 'Lady Bright and Gay'.

MOLLY DANCING is an ancient midwinter pastime with its roots firmly in the English tradition of Morris dancing. It was originally performed by plough boys as they toured their village, asking for money. They blackened their faces with soot, mud or boot polish to hide their identities from their employers.

THE RAMSEY STRAW BEAR is a strange and unique custom from the East Anglian fenlands. A man wears a straw costume from head to toe (above) and is paraded through the streets of the Huntingdonshire village of Ramsey accompanied by hundreds of school children.



Ask Adam: What topic would you like to know more about? Email your suggestions to editor@countryfile.com

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Weather watch

with John Hammond

The evenings are already half an hour lighter than on the shortest day. Snowdrop and daffodil bulbs are pushing their heads skyward. We have turned the corner.

Yes, but it's not so easy to be that chirpy as we stumble out into the still-dark mornings, past the discarded Christmas tree, naked (the tree, that is) but for one sad strand of tinsel, blowing in the breeze.

Our mood swings are mirrored by the fickle personality of the weather.

January 1982 was a month that will be forever etched in my memory. December had been notably cold and snowy, but by the turning of the year, mild Atlantic winds had swept in, bringing to many the hope that the worst was over. But barely a week after New Year those balmy winds were met head-on by an advancing block of intensely cold air, unleashed from the Arctic. At their meeting point a blizzard developed across the southern half of the UK, the ferocity and longevity of which I have never since known. Leaving several feet of drifted snow in its wake, the storm departed days later, but the temperature fell shockingly low through the following nights. I notched -18°C in our Cotswold garden, while in the Scottish Highlands, an all-time record of -27.2°C was measured. Our central heating oil solidified. Yet by mid-month, the weather had turned dramatically and a rapid thaw ensued. Siberia did not come our way again that winter – much to one young boy's disappointment – and the bulbs renewed their push for spring.



Watch weatherman John Hammond on BBC News and *Countryfile*.

don't miss



The Mistress of Misrule and the Green Man wake the spirits of the trees from the depths of winter at a wassail in Kenninghall Wood, Norfolk

Tradition

WASSAILING

Old Mill Farm Bolney, Sussex

The ancient custom of apple howling or wassailing came about in order to drive out the evil spirits and encourage the good spirits to produce a bountiful apple crop for the following year's cider.

The West Country is the most famous and largest cider-producing region of the country, and some of the most important wassails are held annually in Carhampton and Dunster (Somerset) and Whimble

(Devon), both on 17 January (old Twelfth Night). Clevedon (North Somerset) holds an annual wassailing event in the popular Clevedon Community Orchard, combining the traditional elements of the festival with entertainment and music from the Bristol Morris Men and their cantankerous horse.

And in Bolney, Sussex, watch the locals 'wake' the trees with offers of cider and cake. Delicious!



Make your own wassail punch

And to get in to the spirit of wassailing, why not make your own delicious punch? This winter warmer is perfect for parties – or just as a treat to take away the January blues...

Ingredients:

1l pear cider
1l pear (or cloudy apple) juice
1l cranberry juice
good handful fresh or dried cranberries
150ml sloe gin
2 cinnamon sticks
2 vanilla pods, scored lengthways

This should take five minutes to prepare and a further five to cook. It makes eight to 10 glasses.

Method:

Put all the ingredients into your biggest saucepan or casserole dish. When you're ready to serve, heat to just below simmering point, then ladle into glasses. Cheers!

Many thanks to *BBC Good Food Magazine* for this tasty recipe. Visit bbcgoodfood.com for more great ideas.

ID guide

WINTER COATS

Some species change their colours to better blend in with the winter weather – it's a great winter wildlife spectacle by Phil Gates

MOUNTAIN HARE

Lepus timidus

Distinguished from brown hares by their shorter ears, these high-altitude specialists moult into a pure white winter coat, except for black ear tips. Most common in Scotland.



PTARMIGAN

Lagopus mutus

Confined to mountains and high hills in northern Scotland, ptarmigans are reluctant to fly, relying on superb winter camouflage to make them hard to spot in snow.



STOAT

Mustela erminea

Lowland stoats retain brown coats all year round but in severe winters, northern populations moult into a white winter coat, except for the black tail tip.



Meet and greet for growers

POTATO DAY

It may feel like bleak midwinter but garden clubs and societies are stirring – their members attending the growing number of potato days held from early January to mid March. Originally conceived in Wiltshire as a way to conserve and popularise heritage varieties of potato, many potato days now include other veg seeds and fruit. Most are free or very inexpensive to enter and you get a chance to swap seeds with other growers and talk to experts. Visit www.potato-days.net

in season



Q&A:

“What is the browse line?”



Large browsing animals such as deer will eat tree foliage within reach, often stretching on hind legs. If the animals exist in great densities, their browsing leaves a visible line within a wood or across parkland.

By Fergus Collins



Send your questions

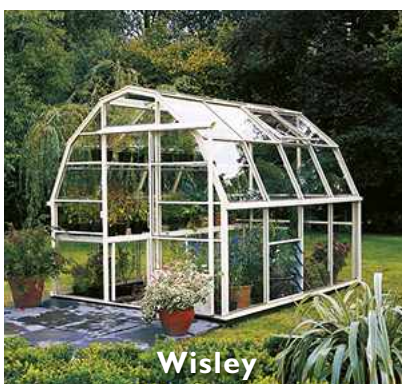
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THE FINEST GREENHOUSES MONEY CAN BUY

OPINION

Sara Maitland

Our new regular columnist explains why she left urban life behind to live among nature, deep in the hills of Galloway

Illustration: Lynn Hatzius

“ Ten years ago, after living in cities for more than 30 years, I came back to Galloway in south-west Scotland. As a writer, I am blessed in having a job that can be done from home, wherever home may be. And home for me is now a self-built, one-bedroomed cottage on the site of a derelict shepherd's house in a remote upland glen where a narrow unfenced road winds up across a huge moor. I have a straggling garden and enormous views.

This is hill-sheep country with rough grass and bog-rocky hills, punctuated by conifer plantations and – increasingly – by wind turbines, but also by patches of ancient woodland, by Bronze Age standing stones, by graves of the Covenanting ‘martyrs’, by tumbled dykes, abandoned steadings and a working signal box for the single-track railway line.

THE SIMPLE LIFE

I came for various reasons; among them a deepening love of solitude and silence and a desire to live more simply and ecologically (although whether living in a place 10 miles from the nearest shop, which makes a car a necessity of life, really meets this last criterion is a moot point). But one of the reasons was a strong urge to reconnect with my own rural youth and re-engage with the awareness of natural history and the countryside that I had been



given by my father as a child. (In his desk when he died, we found our laboriously filled in I-Spy Trees, I-Spy Birds and so on books from the 1950s.) It was not just instruction that we were given; it was a sense of freedom and adventure.

The experts tell us that nature and solitude are among the most significant factors for deepening creativity. It seemed a good move for a middle-aged writer. But over the decade I have realised that, fundamentally, as a writer and as a middle-aged woman, it is not the ‘science’ of it – the botany, ornithology, geology or climatology – that engages me most, although I do believe that knowledge enhances our sensitivity and awareness and deepens our love. Nor am I seeking ‘wilderness’ – were any such thing to be found in the UK – and certainly not the ‘rewilding’ that George Monbiot writes

about so seductively. What intrigues me is the interface between nature and civilisation, between people and the land. Since at least the end of the last major glacial period 20,000 years ago, and the slow return northwards of humans beings, we have been shaping the land for good and ill; we have been digging and planting and mining and hunting and building. We are still at it.

LANGUAGE OF THE LAND

But equally the land has been shaping us; we see this in our language, interests, expectations and imaginations. (We have the words countryside and seaside but no word ‘cityside’.) My most recent book, *Gossip from the Forest*, is about how ancient forests shaped and informed our fairy stories, our ideas of what is magical and what is moral.

It still goes on. It is this living relationship that makes up what we usually call the ‘countryside’. In Britain today, this relationship involves everyone and everything from government policy to the plight of water voles. It is this relationship – how it works and how we can all participate to make it work better to our delight and long term self-interest – that, increasingly, I find I want write about.



Sara Maitland is a writer who lives in Dumfries and Galloway. Her works include *A Book of Silence* and *Gossip from the Forest*.

“ Have your say? What do you think about the issues raised here? Write to the address on page 3 or email editor@countryfile.com



DISCOVER THE ISLES OF SCILLY

Got the post-Christmas blues? Cheer yourself up by planning a trip into the wide blue yonder... to the Isles of Scilly, the glittering archipelago on Cornwall's doorstep, says **Hayley Spurway**

An aerial view of Samson, which, until 1855, was inhabited by just two families surviving on limpets and potatoes. At 38 hectares, it is now the largest uninhabited island of the Isles of Scilly





“BY DAY,
THE AIR IS
FILLED WITH
BIRDCALLS
AND THE
PHUT-PHUT OF
BOAT ENGINES”

ABOVE Tresco Abbey Garden **BELOW** Lady's tresses. The isles have a thriving flower industry

WILDLIFE

The Isles of Scilly are home to one of Europe's most important breeding populations of Atlantic grey seals. One of the best places to spot them is around the Eastern Isles, especially in October, when you can often see seal pups with them. You might also spot dolphins, porpoises or basking sharks.

More than 400 bird species are resident or migrant on Scilly: song thrushes are 12 times more common than on the mainland, and 75% of the world's Manx shearwater population breeds here. Tame cormorants sit on the quaysides, storm petrels and oystercatchers dance above the waves, and warblers and whimbrels pass through on their southerly migration route. Between April and July you might see puffins, which come to breed on the uninhabited islands. You can learn more on a wildlife tour with island resident Will Wagstaff (www.islandwildlifetours.co.uk) or from the Scilly Wildlife Trust: www.ios-wildlifetrust.org.uk.



According to legend, the Isles of Scilly are all that remains of a lost land called Lyonesse, said to have sunk beneath the waves in ancient times. Even today, the islands may be part of the county of Cornwall, but they feel as unique and separate as an entirely different country.

For a start, the climate is milder. Thanks to the warmer waters of the Gulf Stream, there is scarcely ever a frost, so that palms and other sub-tropical plants flourish. There is barely any traffic; by day, the air is filled with birdcall and the phut-phut of boat engines. By night, the skies glitter with stars.

The beauty and mystery of the Isles of Scilly have inspired many novelists, from Michael Morpurgo to Sam Llewellyn. But they have also fascinated lovers of the natural world. The entire archipelago is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and home to an abundance of rare flora including lady's tresses, yellow-horned poppies, dwarf pansies and sea spleenwort.

And it's not just plant life that shrugs off the salt spray and thrives: birds and sea creatures abound too, on a scale that dwarfs the community of 2,500 people who live here.

THE 'BIG' FIVE

The Isles of Scilly lie just 28 miles (45km) from Land's End. In total, the archipelago comprises 150 or so islands and islets, only five of which are inhabited. These five are covered in a patchwork of flower fields, farms and heathland that sprawls onto rocky spits.

At around 2.5 square miles, **St Mary's** is more than twice the size of any of the other islands. But size here is relative: by foot, it only takes about five hours to walk around the island, along its 11 miles of coastal paths. It's worth setting aside all day, though – you'll want to leave time to scale **Telegraph Hill** (at a towering 50m, the highest point on the islands) and dawdle on idyllic beaches like **Pelistry Bay**, where you can clamber over to **Toll's Island** at low tide.

St Mary's is also the most populated island, and the only one where you'll see a few cars on the road. For visitors to Scilly, this is the first port of call, whether you arrive by ferry from Penzance or fly into the airport. Many people opt to stay on St Mary's, relishing the convenience of Hugh Town's restaurants, pubs, galleries and gift shops.

But life here still has all the merits of a Famous Five adventure. Just a short walk away from **Hugh Town** there are beaches, nature trails and scrub-topped hills with intriguing ancient sites – such as the Iron Age burial chamber at **Bant's Carn** and the settlement at **Halangy Down**. What with

Cromwell's Castle on Tresco in summer sunshine – the 17th-century round tower is one of the few surviving Cromwellian fortifications in Britain





The translucent waters around the Isles of Scilly look as though they have been transported from the tropics

“NOWHERE SUMS UP THE RAW POWER AND RUGGED BEAUTY OF THE ISLANDS LIKE HELL BAY”

windsurfing, sailing, cycling, kayaking and horse-riding, there's little need to leave this diverse island, except perhaps to hop aboard a sightseeing trip afloat.

EXPLORING THE 'OFF-ISLANDS'

However, it would be a shame to neglect the 'off islands', as the smaller islands are known. From St Mary's, it's easy to island-hop on passenger ferries. Paddle power is an exciting alternative – this is one of the UK's top kayaking destinations. And on equinoctial tides, it's possible to walk between Tresco and Bryher, and onto uninhabited Samson.

The first place I played castaway was on pint-sized **Tresco**, where I walked barefoot along **Appletree Bay**, heard the ocean bellow from the cavernous **Piper's Hole** and climbed the hefty granite steps of **Cromwell's Castle**. **Pentle Bay** is among the islands' finest beaches, while the **Great Pool** attracts a huge range of migratory birds.

No visitor should leave Tresco without exploring **Tresco Abbey Garden** (www.tresco.co.uk/enjoying/abbey-garden), an extraordinary place where 20,000 exotic plant species, collected from as far away as Australia and South America, bloom amid the ruins of a Benedictine priory.

Tresco is also known for its fantastic food: in fact the relationship between food and the scenery is so intimate that you can point to the fisherman or field where ingredients come from. The island-reared beef is highly rated, and each autumn Tresco and Bryher share an annual food festival, showcasing produce from fish to fudge.

HELL BAY & FARM FUDGE

Just across the narrow sandy channel from Tresco sits **Bryher**, the smallest of the inhabited islands. Here thundering bays,



TOP A view from Bryher, just half a square mile in size **ABOVE** Between 100 and 200 puffin pairs nest on eight of the uninhabited Western Rocks in the Isles of Scilly from the end of April to mid July

granite stacks and glassy coves are crammed into just half a square mile of land.

Life is simpler and more rustic on Bryher. Much of the island's food economy is made from honesty stalls selling vegetables, eggs and Veronica Farm Fudge. It's deceptively calm on its eastern, leeward side, where you can slide your kayak into **Green Bay**. In contrast, nowhere sums up the raw power and rugged beauty of the islands quite like **Hell Bay** on Bryher's western shore. Here I loved climbing the granite stacks of **Shipman Head** at sunset and taking in the island panorama from **Samson Hill**.

CAST YOURSELF AWAY

In contrast to Bryher's ocean coast, **St Martin's** is relatively sheltered and blessed with mile upon mile of sandy beaches – its **Great Bay** is often named among the most beautiful in Britain. There you can picnic on goodies from **St Martin's Island Bakery** (www.theislandbakery-stmartins.com). It's fun to explore beyond the beaches too: take a stroll to the daymark on **Chapel Down** – a red-and-white-striped tower built as a navigation aid to sailors – and peer out to the seabird colonies on the Eastern Isles.

But of all the islands, **St Agnes** is my favourite. Not only because you can pitch your tent on the edge of the Atlantic, but also because on the farm campsite lives a herd of Jersey cows used to produce 30-odd flavours of delicious ice cream. Wander around and you'll encounter extraordinary rock formations on **Wingletang Down**, spot the tower of the decommissioned lighthouse, and find the stone maze on **Castella Down**, left by a lighthouse keeper centuries ago. Here, on Britain's most westerly outpost, you can be a true Robinson Crusoe: cross the sandy causeway to neighbouring **Gugh** at



“WHEN THE TIDE FLOODS BACK OVER THE BAR, YOU ARE COMPLETELY MAROONED”

Hugh Town on St Mary's, the largest settlement on the Isles of Scilly

A SCILLY LIFE

Mike Hicks (below) and his wife Christine used to run a flower farm on St Agnes. When flower prices dropped, they diversified to make ends meet. “We keep 300 chickens to supply eggs to local businesses, we produce apple juice from our orchard, make honey from our bees and grow oil-producing crops to make soap. We grow our own veg, produce our own meat, eggs and milk, and drink water from our borehole. It’s a great life but it doesn’t come without hard work. Winter is tough – you have to be prepared for fewer supplies and can be completely cut off in bad weather. In such a remote location you can’t just call in a plumber or an electrician in the middle of a winter gale.”

www.28miles.co.uk



low tide, and when the tide floods back over the Bar, you are completely marooned on this tiny island, where you can discover the remains of Bronze Age **Obadiah’s Barrow** and **The Old Man of Gugh**.

On the islands with no human population, nature dominates the landscape. Ornithologists flock to deserted Samson and **St Helen’s** to spy on seabirds, and divers come here for the sea life and shipwrecks (www.divescilly.com).

TREACHEROUS SEAS

The Isles of Scilly are thought to be the scene of the greatest concentration of shipwrecks in England, so dangerous are the rocks. The **Valhalla Museum** in Tresco Abbey Gardens holds a collection of some 30 figureheads from shipwrecks around the islands. The most devastating shipwreck was in 1707, when four Royal Navy vessels foundered and up to 1,800 people died. Among them was Sir Cloudesley Shovell, a British admiral. Shovell was washed up on **Porth Hellick Cove** on St Mary’s, where – story has it – a local woman found him barely alive and killed him for the emerald ring on his finger.


These days, the welcome is far more hospitable. After centuries eking out a living through kelp burning, shipbuilding, early potatoes and flower farming, many Scillonians now make a crust from tourism, which comprises 85% of the economy.

SCILLY SEASONS

Fortunately for the islanders, a small number of visitors keep the tourist trade ticking over all year round. These holiday-makers have discovered that the summer

months aren’t the only time to visit – the frost-free winters are worth witnessing too. Hundreds of wildflowers bloom even in midwinter, while the fields shimmer with early-flowering golden narcissi – and flower farmers are busy picking and packing them to be shipped to the mainland in time for Christmas. “Most visitors never get to see the low winter light raking the Eastern Isles, with the russets of the heathland and the slate green of the ocean,” says Oriel Hicks, a stained glass artist on St Mary’s.

Spring is a prime time for walkers to hit the 60 miles of coastal paths and nature trails. An annual walking festival in April offers visitors the chance to gen up on archaeology, birdlife and wildflowers under the tutelage of local experts. In late spring, the islands also gear up for the **World Pilot Gig Championships**. This brings rowers from around the world to compete in a sport forged by the 19th-century oarsmen who rowed their boats out to incoming ships to compete for the job of piloting them into harbour.

But whenever you visit, the islands make a wonderful break. Since my first trip there I’ve returned time and time again, eager for another hit of the wild beauty that smacks you like the saline winds whipping your cheeks after their journey across 3,000 miles of sea. For barefoot simplicity, incredible wildlife and stylish island life, there’s nowhere in the world like the Isles of Scilly. 



Hayley Spurway has spent much of her life exploring Cornwall, penning material for magazines, websites and guidebooks, including the Cool Places e-guidebook to the Isles of Scilly. www.seainsight.co.uk, [@hayleyspurway](https://twitter.com/hayleyspurway)

Photos: Adam White, Alamy, Robert Birkby



The Garrison Walls on St Mary's, built in 1588 after the Spanish Armada's defeat and extended around the headland in the 18th century

NOW GO THERE ➤

Hayley Spurway on the best places to stay, local treats and unmissable sights...

MAPPED OUT

- 1 The Turk's Head
- 2 Adam's Fish and Chips
- 3 High Tide
- 4 Troytown Farm
- 5 Seaways Farm Holiday Homes
- 6 Hell Bay Hotel
- 7 Cromwell's Castle
- 8 Tresco Abbey Garden
- 9 St Martin's Island Bakery



NOW GO THERE

Flights

Skybus flights service St Mary's from Land's End, Newquay and Exeter six days a week, Monday to Saturday. From Land's End and Newquay these flights run all year round; from Exeter, March to October. Fares start at £70.

0845 710 5555,
www.islesofscilly-travel.co.uk



Ferries

The *Scillonian III* sails from Penzance to St Mary's six days a week from March to November (there are Sunday sailings in high season). The crossing takes 2 hours 40 minutes. Fares start at £43 one way.

0845 710 5555,
www.islesofscilly-travel.co.uk



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01720 422848, www.scillysealsnorkelling.com

BOAT TRIPS

Explore the Western Isles on a two-hour trip to Bishop Rock Lighthouse, departing from St Mary's (£16, www.scillyboating.co.uk). Or hop on board a RIB with Island Sea Safaris for a two-hour 'Shipwrecks, Seals and Seabirds' excursion (£33, www.islandseasafaris.co.uk). For kayak and boat hire on Bryher, visit Bennet Boatyard (www.bennettboatyard.com)



Visitors queue to board a pleasure boat on St Martin's

HOLIDAY READ

Several of Michael Morpurgo's children's stories have been set on the islands, including *Why The Whales Came* and *The Wreck of the Zanzibar*. His latest novel *Listen to the Moon*, set on the Scillies during the First World War, is an enthralling read for all ages. michaelmorpurgo.com/books/listen-to-the-moon



PERFECT PINT

The Turk's Head, St Agnes

Britain's most south-westerly pub is the country's only watering hole where you can watch gig racing, look out upon sub-tropical islands and listen to shearwaters on your walk home. It also serves its own Turk's Head Ale (brewed by St Austell Brewery), as well as hot chocolate with a kick of St Agnes brandy.

01720 422434



SEAFOOD MEAL

For simple hand-caught fish and chips made from island-grown potatoes, you can't beat **Adam's Fish & Chips** on St Martin's. 01720 4230832, www.adamsfishandchips.co.uk

For a more sophisticated seafood meal try **High Tide** on St Agnes, where chef Mark Eberlein brings influences from the Pacific Rim into a menu dictated by what local fishermen have landed. From £27 for a three-course meal. 01720 423869, www.hightide-seafood.com.



Hell Bay Hotel

3 OF THE BEST PLACES TO STAY

BUDGET

Troytown Farm, St Agnes

Pitch your tent on the edge of the Atlantic and you can't beat the views. But when storms scud in over the ocean, you might prefer to be 'glamping' in one of the sturdy bell tents, or even retreat to one of the self-catering units. Dogs allowed. Camping from £9 per person. Self-catering cottages range from £350 to £1,015 per week.

01720 422360, www.troytown.co.uk

MID-RANGE

Seaways Farm Holiday Homes, St Mary's

Enjoy unrivalled sea views from this cluster of converted farm buildings at Seaways Flower Farm. Not only do these offer classic, dog-friendly accommodation an easy footfall from St Mary's treasures, you've also got Juliet's Garden Restaurant serving delicious island food here too. £500-£1,240 per week.

01720 422845,

www.julietsgardenrestaurant.co.uk/seawaysfarmholidayhomes

BLOW OUT

Hell Bay Hotel, Bryher

This stylish hotel offers pure indulgence on the edge of a rugged bay. Its 25 suites are decked out with Lloyd Loom furniture and Malabar fabrics, there are spa treatments on offer and the grounds feature works by some of Cornwall's leading artists. From £120 DB&B per night.

01720 422947, www.hellbay.co.uk

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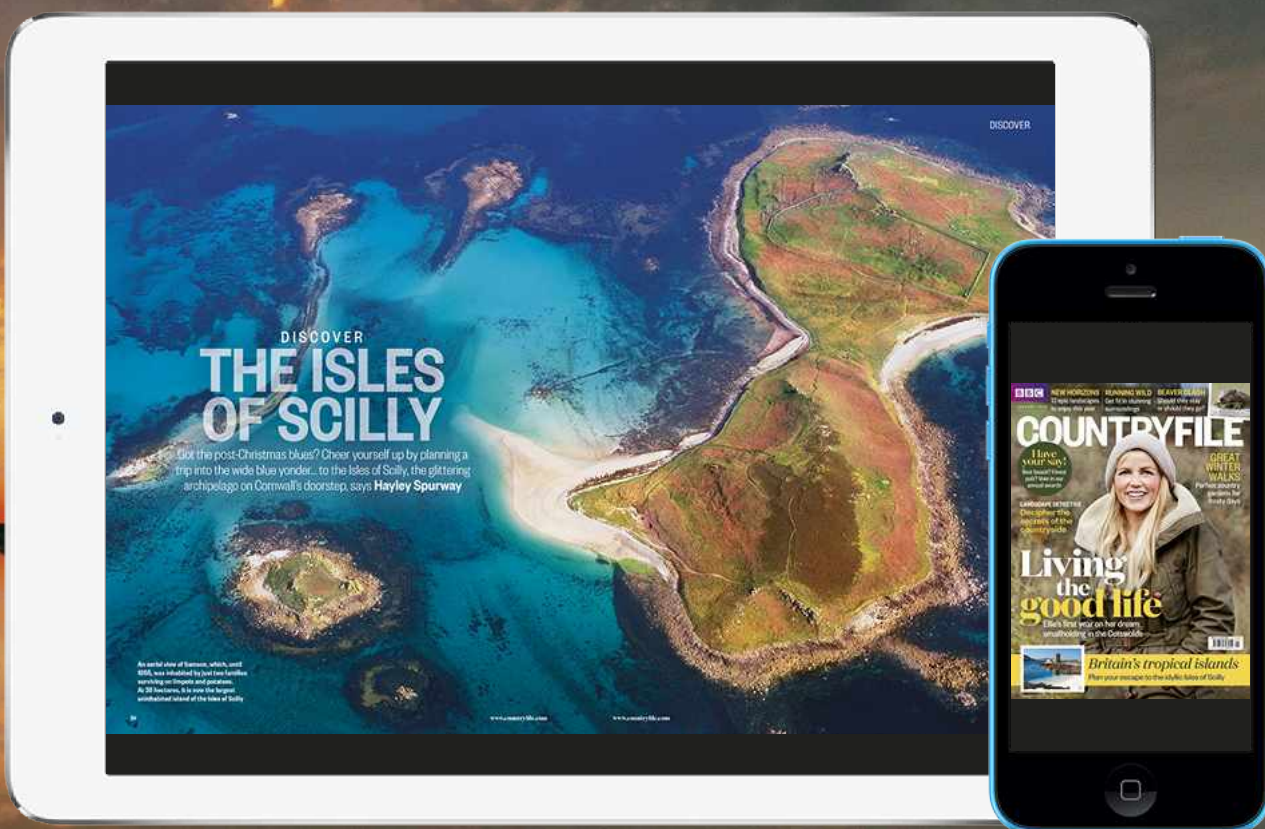


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Lessons from the **LANDSCAPE DETECTIVE**

Can you establish your bearings from a puddle? Locate a gold seam by the surrounding plants? **Tristan Gooley** talks you through the outdoor signs that will turn you into the natural world's Sherlock Holmes...

Photos: **Philip Hartley** Illustrations: **Fiona Osbaldstone**

Lots of people like to switch off when they go for a walk and there is nothing wrong with that. But there is no getting away from the fact that we miss a lot of useful, intriguing and fun clues in our surroundings when we ignore the rich detail that our senses are feeding us.

Human beings clearly love solving puzzles indoors. From crosswords and Sudoku to crime novels and detective TV dramas, the popularity of this type of deductive thinking never wanes. And yet there is an assumption that this part of our brain needs to go to sleep the moment we step outdoors – it's a bizarre and incorrect assumption, and one that I spend most of my working hours trying to overturn.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Every single thing we see outdoors – every hill, plant, animal, star, cloud, even puddle – is a clue to something helpful or interesting. Often it is general and only a little useful: lots of cumulus clouds, those familiar fluffy sheep marching across the sky, are a clue that fair weather is likely to hold. Sometimes it is more specific and useful: those dark green clumps of soft rush are telling you where the boggy ground is and helping you draw a map of the best route to

take on your walk. And puddles? You get more puddles on the shaded southern side of tracks, so they can form a basic compass for you.

PLANTING CLUES

Plants are so sensitive to their environment that they can give you quite extraordinary clues. There are plants that will tell you where there is copper, silver, gold and even diamonds in the ground. Alpine pennycress indicates the areas of the UK where lead mining has taken place quite accurately. Even the colour of mud helps you map out an area. I once noticed the mud turn from dark brown to bright red and realised that the disused iron ore mine I was looking for must be very nearby.

Enjoying these signs is a game of awareness and anyone can do it, it's just a case of choosing to tune in at the level that suits you. There have been many occasions where these techniques have made walkers safer and they even saved my life once, many years ago, when I was lost on a volcano in Indonesia. But whatever use they are put to, these techniques make every minute outdoors more rewarding. And they are social too, because walkers love having things pointed out to them, almost as much as they enjoy pointing things out!





Tristan Gooley is the author of *The Walker's Guide to Outdoor Clues and Signs*.

Tip:

Look for telltale parallel scratches on exposed rock surfaces. These 'striations' will align dependably with the direction the glacier was moving so can act as a compass.



Shape

Every exploration should include some thought about the shape of the landscape that surrounds you. Study the biggest pieces of the jigsaw first: the summits, ridges, rivers, coastlines and familiarise yourself with their orientation and layout. Now work out what forces have created this landscape. Most of our landscapes will reveal ground shaped by water – in the form of sea, rivers or glaciers. Once you have organised the land in your mind, you can look for subtler clues and hidden meaning. In glacier country, many protruding rocks can be used as compasses once you've worked out that the valley you are standing in was formed by a glacier's ice flowing from south to north.



Lichens

There are around 1,600 lichen species in the UK, but we don't need to know them all to find them helpful. Instead, notice how certain trees have more lichens and others fewer: lichens are very sensitive to the pH of bark. For example, pines are acidic so are home to fewer lichens, whereas oaks make great hosts. Next, spot how lichens grow differently on a tree – perhaps flourishing on one side and struggling on the other.

Lichens are also sensitive to air quality, moisture levels and light. On a sunny day, note which like the bright southern side of trees and which prefer the shadier, damper north side. These will then form a dependable compass when the sun is behind clouds. Tip: the bright orange lichen *Xanthoria* likes well-lit southern aspects.

Stinging nettles

Many people assume stinging nettles will grow anywhere, but they won't. Stinging nettles need higher than normal phosphate levels in the soil. The way humans live, work and tend animals makes the soil richer in phosphates and so stinging nettles are a clue to human habitation of some kind. You do get lots along fields that have been fertilised, but away from these areas, they are a dependable clue that civilisation is not far away. If you are on a walk from a wilder area to a village pub, then the sight of stinging nettles may be the first clue that lunch is not far off...



Rainbows

Rainbows are not just pretty, they are also full of information. A rainbow only forms when the rain is in front of you and the sun is directly behind you. Since most of our weather comes from the west, rainbows in the morning mean the weather is usually about to get worse and rainbows in the afternoon mean the weather is probably just about to improve. Each colour in a rainbow is also a clue to the type of raindrops out there. To keep it simple, the more red you see at the top of the bow, the bigger the raindrops.



Trees

ARBOREAL ALTIMETER We can use trees to help us read a landscape in lots of different ways, but we will start with the most basic. When walking in an area with high hills, notice how the trees map out altitude for you. There will be broad-leaved, deciduous trees low in the valleys. A little higher up, these trees struggle and are replaced by evergreen conifers. Higher still, you see the treeline, the point at which the wind and temperatures are too severe for any trees to grow. As you travel through these levels, see how the trees of each species grow less tall with altitude, before giving up altogether.

TERRAIN TIP-OFF The trees do not just map altitude, but the nature of the terrain as well. Starting with the help of a map, if you look out over a landscape that is a mix of wet and dry areas, notice how the trees change

with the amount of water. Beech trees only thrive in dry land away from rivers, lakes or marshes, whereas water-loving trees such as willows or alders often mark the line of a river. You know you're getting the hang of this technique when you can spot a river using the trees instead of the map and before seeing any water.

TREE BREEZE There are 19 different ways to use a tree to navigate. The best one to start with is to recognise how the tops of exposed trees get blown over by the prevailing wind. Since our winds blow more commonly from the southwest, we find that tree tops tend to be combed over from southwest to northeast. The more you practise, the more you spot this in more sheltered areas, but it is easiest to start in exposed areas.

Tip:

Look above the door of old country churches. There is sometimes a sundial. The gnomon (the pointy bit that casts the shadow) will point due south.

Churches

Churches can act as a compass in more ways than many would believe possible. Country churches tend to be aligned west-east, with the altar at the eastern end and the entrance at the western end, but on the southern side. The older gravestones are usually on the southern side of a church as historically this was the preferred side. The graves are usually aligned west-east too, with the gravestone at the western end. ➤



Clover

If you look closely at a grass lawn, you will quickly spot that what appears a simple green carpet is a little more interesting on closer inspection. In among the blades of grass you will spot the broad little leaves of clover. Clover is a plant that does relatively well in areas that get trampled by people or animals and so wherever you see lots of clover in a lawn, you can be confident that it is a popular area with people. Try to work out why: favourite picnic spots, the area where football gets played, possibly even a line on one side of a washing line? Once you have perfected this near home, you can use it to find shortcuts and other half-secret paths in wilder landscapes.

Tip:

There are other path-indicating plants such as pineapple weed and plantains, but clover is a good place to start.



Tip:

Work out the timing of animals passing using recent weather. If there was a rain shower a few hours earlier and the track has raindrops on it, you know that the animal passed by before the rain came.

Tracks

The outdoors is a canvas covered in footprints. Tracking, the ancient art of reading signs left by animals and people, is a wonderful way of drawing clues from the land around you. There are some simple tips that will help you succeed quickly. You will notice infinitely more if you lower your eyes to nearer the ground – the lower the better – and if you look when the light is coming from low in the sky too: early morning or late afternoon are best. Soft mud works well and snow or sand are a real treat for beginners. Everywhere outdoors, there are stories written in the ground, waiting to be read.

Colourful landscapes

Understanding the effects of light is very helpful when building a picture of your surroundings. Next time you see a range of hills, you should be able to see how the hill behind is always lighter than the hill in front. This is due to an effect called 'Rayleigh scattering'. We can gauge distance roughly by looking at how light things are compared to others.

We can also predict some enjoyable effects. The next time you find yourself outside on a late afternoon of bad weather, keep an eye out for a break in the clouds near the end of the day. If the sun does emerge, stand with your back to it and look at the landscape in front of you: it will be a treat of almost technicolour brilliance. With the dark sky as a background and the sun's bright light bouncing off the scenery, any landscape will appear extraordinarily colourful. **CF**

Photo: Alamy



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Ellie's acres

After taking over a five-acre orchard in the Cotswolds, *Countryfile* presenter and naturalist **Ellie Harrison** decides her first challenge is to attract more wildlife. After all, how hard can it be?

Photos: Oliver Edwards

“These are pretty much bomb-proof, they’ll grow anywhere,” reassured the Kew Gardens expert, handing me a packet of wild flower seeds especially marked ‘E’ – for ‘England’. Just the one packet, the size of a Sherbert Dip Dab. The other quarter of a million were being kept back for *Countryfile* viewers who were tasked with calling or applying online for their own free sachet. Who doesn’t like a freebie? Within hours of the broadcast, the *Countryfile* audience had lifted the lot. Hotter than Kate Bush tickets.

In my newly rented orchard, I (and my Mum, in exchange for her single packet) scraped away the thatched grass and dug over a patch of earth the size of a single mattress. “Is it a grave for an ex-presenter?” ventured our cameraman (certainly not), as I scattered the seed mix of ox-eye daisy, red campion and corncockle.

It was a useful experiment in my hopes for this steep five-acre ancient

cider orchard, plastering the north face of the Golden Valley near Stroud. Entirely beautiful, but what to do with it? Livestock? Cider? Slim pickings at this scale to make it pay.

But one can never have too much wildlife, I reasoned, so managing the place accordingly was an excellent way to start. To its great credit, the Golden Valley is already thickly stocked with broadleaf woods. And trees are one of the two most impactful features when it comes to supporting wildlife. The second is water, and my place has a freshwater spring seeping down the middle.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

An obvious additional enticement for wildlife is offering food. Not feeders or hoppers for the charismatic mega-fauna. They can look after themselves, as long as I can get it right for the most important group of animals of all: invertebrates. Bring in the creepy crawlies and soon enough come the birds, the reptiles and the mammals. ➤



Ellie at her
Cotswolds
smallholding



Dead wood is essential if you want to encourage wildlife to your plot

So, it's first a big NO to spraying chemicals; second, a big YES to leaving the deadwood; and third, a big YES restoring the grassland to wildflowers. How hard can that be in year one? With no discernable crop yet to draw my attention, I can well do without spraying – tick. The 29 ancient apple trees carry, and have dropped, a decent weight of dead wood, rotting silently and helpfully away. More than 1,000 British invertebrate species rely on dead wood during at least one stage of their life cycle, including worms, snails, spiders, copepods, millipedes, centipedes, pseudoscorpions, mites and numerous insects. Indeed, the noble chafer beetle is shuffling its way off this mortal coil but has a medium hold in the ancient cider orchards of Gloucestershire (although the orchardists I've spoken to have never seen one).

So, deadwood – tick. Onto the grass.

Hmm... I don't recall having ever even seen the soil, so thick is the sward. It is nutrient rich, partially 'improved' and heaving with cocksfoot and Yorkshire fog, punctuated by nettle, dock and thistle. A pollinator couldn't be more unimpressed with the offering. Wildflowers, we understand, like nutrient-poor soil. Various Wildlife Trusts are now encouraging property developers to cover gardens with hardcore and the thinnest layer of soil because that is how the wildflowers like it. Except my sweet pack – they grow anywhere. Actually, how are they doing? A tiny amount of greenery is starting to show. If these work, perhaps

“The 29 ancient apple trees have dropped a decent weight of dead wood, rotting helpfully away”

I don't need to do that much legwork after all, merely lift the grass and sow.

GRAZE OR MOW?

What else can I do to encourage wildflowers? The idea is simple: remove the grass, taking out the competition, and lay wildflower seed – starting with yellow rattle, the muscle of the wildflower world. But putting the plan into effect is anything but. Remove the grass by mowing or grazing? Grazing has a long conservation heritage. But sheep, traditionally used for orchards because they avoid the trees, require ugly (and pricey) fencing. And they die as soon as you look at them.

Cattle are far more robust. Speaking to Adam (“Britain's Best Loved Farmer™”) convinces me that Dexters would be the ideal starter cow. But as I type in my Government Gateway ID (ordinarily reserved for processing my tax return) to try to navigate the correct paperwork for having the cows, my heart falls to my boots. All this to cut the grass?

And I foresee further problems. The calendar for farming cows doesn't work well with the calendar for cows in conservation. Hard grazing is required pre-summer; I'd then need to take the cows off during the delicate seeding months of the summer (particularly around the freshwater spring where I've found water forget-me-not, brook lime and meadow vetchling); then cows on again from late summer to winter for hard grazing plus a bit of poaching.

Charming as they'd be, cows require more input than mowing equipment. But with mowing, the cut grass must be removed completely because when the grass is high, most of the nutrients are above ground. So topping isn't the answer. Could I offer the haycrop as payment for removing it? Only if I can find a farmer who isn't consumed with the harvest when my grass has any value at all (any later and the sugars have altered, rendering it no good). And who is prepared to bring machinery to a steep gradient with slim access?

I begin looking into buying machinery for hilly terrain. The good stuff comes from Italy and Austria. Perhaps they'll offer a discount in return for my eternal gratitude? “Certainly. We could do you a power-scythe, power-rake and mini-baler for £14k plus VAT. Any good?” Um, not really.

HOPE SPRINGS

Weeks later, I look at the inane grin of the flower fairy (me!) staring blankly back from a newspaper, *Countryfile's* free seeds fanned out in her hands, above a warning that they contain a dark secret. Not joy and invertebrate heaven, but toxicity from corncockles [NB: the threat is negligible according to Kew experts and nothing to worry about]. Brilliant. It reminds me to check on my graveyard patch. I wander down hopefully. Bare earth, a smattering of grass and two piles of Muntjac poo.

Looking out now, there, in the winter light, sits my still-beautiful orchard, the docks and thistles mocking me with every breath of wind. It's been a slow start, but let's see what spring brings. ☺



Watch Ellie on *Countryfile* on Sunday evenings on BBC One.



TOP A view of Ellie's smallholding
CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT
Brook lime in the freshwater
spring; Ellie inspects the sward's
thickness; signs of invertebrate
life; scenes from the Golden
Valley; Ellie checks up on newly
grafted rare Stroud apple variety



pembrokeshire



A panel of 340 National Geographic magazine experts ranked Pembrokeshire as the second best coastline in the world, sharing second place with the Tutukaka Coast in New Zealand and beating places like The Seychelles, Bermuda and Costa Rica. Tripadvisor asked its customers to vote for their favourite beach destinations in the UK. Tenby was rated 5th in front of Woolacombe, Padstow, Shanklin and Swanage.

The Pembrokeshire Coast path was rated as the third best walking trail in the world by another online travel advisor, Cheapflights. It even beat Mount Kilimanjaro and the Inca Trail. Visit Britain also recognised how special the Pembrokeshire Coast is by rating it the 4th best Coastal Place in Britain behind The White Cliffs of Dover, The Jurassic Coast and Brighton.

MORE AWARDS:

The Times top 20 walks - **Stackpole Head**
The Telegraph 12 best beaches in Britain
- **Marloes Sands**
The Independent UK's hottest tourist spots
- **Freshwater West Beach**
Great Outdoors best places to camp in the UK
- **Caerfai Bay**
Sunday Mirror best beaches - **Barafundle**
Best Magazine best beaches - **Tenby**
The Independent best European beaches
- **Barafundle**
Wild Swimming best swim spots
- **The Blue Lagoon at Abereiddi**
The Independent best summer walks
- **The Pembrokeshire Coast Path**



Go to www.visitpembrokeshire.com to find out more and discover all of the places mentioned above and order a brochure.

p e m b r o k e s h i r e



COUNTRYFILE NEWS

JOHN CRAVEN

LET'S ALL RESOLVE TO EXPLORE THE COUNTRYSIDE

I propose a New Year Resolution for the nation – we should all get out more. Our vast and diverse countryside is just waiting to be enjoyed. No doubt I'm preaching to the converted, dear reader, but there are millions of others whose only foray into the green acres is a vicarious one, courtesy of TV programmes like *Countryfile*.

They need to stop being passive, put on some strong shoes and take themselves and, importantly, their children into a landscape where they will encounter beauty, nature and help the struggling rural economy by popping into pubs, cafes and shops. But can this ever be achieved? What about the long-held belief that many city dwellers feel uncertain and unwelcome in the countryside – isn't that why they stick to concrete pavements instead?

RURAL SPIRIT

In a recent article, Prince Charles argued that the majority of people had "lost any real connection with the land" and it showed in their attitudes. But although they had only a vague understanding of farming and were increasingly suspicious of it, he said, they still treasured the countryside.

Simply treasuring it, though, will not safeguard its future. Some urban folk do spend their spare time in rural areas walking, riding, climbing and so on. It makes them care about their surroundings and defend them. Many more have yet to discover what the countryside can offer, although, deep down, they too may have a



The benefits will be felt across the board if our spectacular countryside is enjoyed by everyone on a regular basis

“Many townies have the worrying image of a farmer shouting ‘Get off my land!’”

rural spirit that dates back to before their forebears quit the land generations ago.

“People’s emotional need for rural life is not diminished by distance and I think it would be interesting to ask what examples of it exist in urban places. Think of city farms, of keeping chickens, of urban naturalists, of beekeeping on city rooftops,” says Adrian Cooper, director of charity Common Ground (www.commonground.org.uk). He cites community groups fighting to stop car parks being built on their allotments or orchards.

But when blogger Dan Raven-Ellison spent a day during the school holidays travelling through London’s urban woodland from Croydon to Barnet he saw deer, foxes, woodpeckers and snakes – but not a single child. Sadly, the attractions of the electronic age and concerns over health and safety have largely closed off the outdoors to the young, urban and rural alike.

OPEN COUNTRY WELCOME

That trend could be reversed if more people set out into the green unknown – but would they find it welcoming? Though farming and landowning organisations say they actively encourage visitors with events such as Open Farm Sunday (7 June), research shows there is confusion among many ‘townies’ about just where they are allowed to roam. They still have the worrying image in their minds of a farmer shouting “Get off my land!”

And 100,000 footpath problems in England alone, from missing signposts to dangerous barbed wire, don’t make things easier. To help newcomers, the Ramblers (www.ramblers.org.uk) organise groups led by an expert walker who knows where they can go and can explain the ways of the rural world. It’s in nobody’s interest for that world to be seen as a partisan, hostile environment. For the future well-being of both our countryside and ourselves, I hope my resolution doesn’t – like many others – fall by the wayside.



Watch John on *Countryfile* on Sunday evenings on BBC One.

THE COUNTRYSIDE IN 2015

HOPES AND FEARS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

With a new year dawning, we ask six rural commentators to gaze into their crystal balls and give their views on the big issues that concern the countryside we all love.

By Mark Rowe



JANICE BANKS
Chief executive, Action With
Communities in Rural England



MEURIG RAYMOND
President of the
National Farmers Union

HOPES

What are your
hopes for 2015?

“That the Government invests in supporting rural communities so they can continue to develop and thrive.”

“We need rural communities to manage the land and feed the nation and they are the ones who, with support, are best placed to find solutions to their local challenges.”

“I hope to see less volatility both in the market place and the weather to enable British farmers to sustainably increase food production for a growing population.”

FEARS

What are your
fears for 2015?

“Continued austerity measures by the Government will lead to rural communities being sidelined in favour of big city regions. The Government’s focus is on the big city numbers and it ignores the contribution that the rural economy makes with its small and medium-sized enterprises, and the potential it has to do more with the right investment.”

“We need to tackle the spread of bovine TB rapidly for our beef and dairy farmers. For our arable farmers and fruit and vegetable growers we need to ensure there aren’t further unnecessary restrictions on the number of plant protection products they can use and that any regulation needs to be based on sound science.”

WISHES

If you had a magic wand,
what would you make
happen in 2015?

“To provide everyone with super-fast broadband and the skills to use it.”

“Super-fast broadband is the key to choice, price comparisons, savings, education and communication. Those without it are at risk of being left behind, of becoming increasingly isolated from society.”

“I would ensure the next government elected, whatever the colour, puts British farming at the heart of decision-making across all departments to enable British farms to thrive and continue to produce the high quality, traceable food the British public want to buy.”





Further thoughts... For more crystal-ball gazing, with views from the Campaign to Protect Rural England, the Rural Services Network, 38 Degrees and the Farmers Guardian, visit www.countryfile.com



PETER NIXON

Director of land, landscape & nature at the National Trust

"I hope that as a nation with salt in our veins and none of us living that far from the sea, we will all get out in 2015 to enjoy our very special and beautiful coastline. This year is the 50th anniversary of our fund-raising campaign, Neptune, which over five decades has enabled us to save and look after precious coastline on behalf of the nation."



BARNEY WHITE-SPUNNER

Executive chairman of the Countryside Alliance



"I hope this year we sort out mobile phone reception and broadband speeds in the countryside. It is really not on that a third of rural people and businesses are dissatisfied by their mobile service and broadband speed. We need to make it easier for telecoms companies to build the infrastructure to improve services in rural communities."



MIKE CLARKE

Chief executive of the RSPB

"That all the main political parties understand the crisis our wildlife faces and make ambitious and robust pledges in their manifestos for nature. People deserve to know what a future government is going to do to tackle the decline in farmland birds, hedgehogs, butterflies and wildflowers, so now is the time for them to make it clear."



ANDREW GILRUTH

Director of communications at the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust

"I hope the conservation community will embrace a 'do it now' approach. Form filling and approval by faceless 'head office' staff is killing passion and commitment to making real change. But, at the end of the day, change happens, field by field, wood by wood. This works best when the people that live and work in our countryside feel free to get on."

"My biggest fears are that plant and animal disease has an ever-greater, adverse impact on conservation interests, and that we fail to reach effective international agreement on addressing climate change. The impact of the storms last year on our landscape and coastline brought home the threat we face from extreme weather."

"Rural people have to travel longer distances for work, healthcare, petrol, banking and shops and often pay a premium for these. We need more affordable housing in the countryside, more local businesses and to retain a six-day-a-week postal service."

"If action is not taken, the countryside will fall even further behind."

"I remain deeply concerned that the magnificent hen harrier, an iconic species in our uplands, could disappear from England. There were just four pairs nesting this summer. Without a more responsible approach within the shooting industry and a credible plan of action from the Government, there is the very real possibility that this will be their last year."

"Conservation issues are becoming oversimplified."

"I fear those who have become masters of raising conservation income through running campaigns around human-wildlife conflict will become addicted to it. Should the public see conservation initiatives as political infighting, our countryside may be worse off."

"My magic wand would make effective vaccination against TB an instant reality for both badgers and cattle, thus addressing the scourge that affects both."

"I would remove the Hunting Act from the statute book. This poorly thought through, illogical and undemocratic piece of legislation is not working for anyone. It sets a dreadful precedent of a law based on misplaced prejudice against a group of people, rather than evidence or principle. If we accept the Hunting Act, we are increasingly open to an animal rights agenda that would have a profound impact on farming and the countryside."

"I'd bring nature back into our children's lives."

We're campaigning to ensure that playing outdoors remain part of everyone's childhood. The turtle dove risks becoming a Christmas carol memory. I want the purr of the turtle dove to be part of their heritage."



"Every single one of us spends a day in the countryside..."

... to a place we have never been. Not rushing through it. Not worrying about bird declines or mobile phones. Just a day sitting there. If we all enjoy the incredible beauty, perhaps we can spend more energy on keeping it that way for future generations."



DEVON'S WILD BEAVERS:

SHOULD THEY STAY OR GO?

Why are conservationists so keen to allow beavers to 'manage' our rivers?

Fergus Collins goes to see these tree-felling, dam-building rodents in action – and find out whether they really do more good than harm



The Eurasian beaver is found sporadically throughout northern Europe and across central Asia to China. It has recently been discovered in the wild in both eastern Scotland and Devon

Size of a Labrador – well, at least a cocker spaniel,” says Peter Burgess, conservation manager for Devon Wildlife Trust. We are standing beside the River Otter in Devon talking about the Eurasian beavers that have set up home here and I am quickly revising – upwards – my idea of how big these creatures are. Having been bombarded with opinions for and against the continued existence of this wild population, I’m determined to see for myself what impact beavers are having on the landscape.

Beavers were once native to the UK but were hunted to extinction as recently as 300 years ago – “as vermin, for their fur and also for their meat, which was highly prized,” says Peter. Now, 10-15 human generations later – “only a blink of an eye in ecological terms” adds Peter – they have returned and there are perhaps 10 on the Otter. No one knows how they got here, although escapes from private collections have occurred elsewhere in the UK. Others claim the beavers were released deliberately.

Arguments rage as to whether the animals should stay. Conservationists such as DWT say that beaver dams improve a river’s water quality and flow, as well as creating mosaics of habitat for a range of wildlife; some anglers fear the dams will impede migrating fish, while some landowners and riverside homeowners are concerned about potential flooding caused by the dams as well as loss of trees and crops.

Defra wishes to capture the beavers to test them for a disease that is potentially fatal to humans: *Echinococcus multilocularis* (see page 47). This is welcomed by the Angling Trust and landowning organisations such as the CLA. The DWT agrees that they need to be



LEFT Here be beavers: a stretch of the River Otter in Devon **BELOW** Wood rush showing tell-tale signs of beaver nibbling... **BOTTOM** ... as does this willow twig **RIGHT** Fergus and Peter inspect a newly felled adult willow



tested but is concerned the beavers would not be released back into the wild if proved to be disease-free.

I wanted to get a feel for the impact they are having on the River Otter. Peter and his colleagues are monitoring the wild population and he leads me from a public footpath into a willow and alder thicket beside the river. Soon we are in a wilderness of waterlogged woods, oxbow lakes and side streams – the result of the river’s sporadic, meandering force taking advantage of the area’s friable soils. A kingfisher zeeps past, a young heron takes off wearily with an audible “harrumph” and siskins chatter from the alders.

Where are the dams, I ask? “Well, the water is deep enough for them here not to need them. The beavers use dams to create deep pools as refuges, as well as to make it easier to get around. They also use deep water as a refrigerator to store food in over the winter. So they tend to build the dams in the smaller upper tributaries,” says Peter.

We had to search quite hard to find signs of the animals’ impact – the ends of willow twigs and branches, chiseled to a fine, pencil point and occasional felled saplings. Eventually, and to my delight, we found a newly felled willow tree.



“SOON WE ARE IN A WILDERNESS OF WATERLOGGED WOODS, OXBOX LAKES... A HERON TAKES OFF WEARILY”

Its trunk was a foot in diameter, chiseled through in cartoon-fashion and surrounded by bright wood chips. “How long would a beaver take to get through this?” I ask. “One evening,” Peter replies. I won’t be able to give up my chainsaw just yet.

Alas, that is the most we see of the beavers in the wild – they’re mostly active from dusk to dawn. But surely

the impact on the landscape would increase were the population to grow and spread through the river system?

“That’s why we’ve been running a captive beaver project since 2011, so we can monitor them over many years,” says Peter. He drives me to the little-known heart of Devon some 50 miles from the River Otter – an area of rare ‘culm’ grasslands. Here the DWT has built an impregnable fence around a soggy area of scrubby wood and introduced a pair of beavers, which have raised three young. The idea is to see whether these captive beavers will control the scrub through their felling and dam-building and if there is an additional impact on biodiversity.

We take great care going through the electric fence – and beyond that, the impact of the beavers is startling. Throughout this wet woodland with its trickle of water, the beavers have built dams, creating glades and a series of stepped pools, which Peter describes as “paddyfields”. Between these, the beavers have built a network of canals to help them move around. Peter tells me that “they’re triggered by the sound of running water, which helps them patch up holes in their dams”.

The dams themselves are impressive – up to one-metre high – and, though there are no fish in this boggy wood, such a structure would surely impede



a stream. Mark Lloyd of the Angling Trust told *BBC Countryfile Magazine* earlier this year: “Nearly all fish need to move up and down rivers and the addition of beaver dams to the 20,000 man-made weirs and dams already on our rivers and would only increase the number of obstacles that fish have to overcome.”

I put this to Peter. He acknowledges that beavers could be a localised problem for fish in tributaries, but he offers a solution. “In places where it’s unacceptable, dams could be removed or access restricted to vitally important fish-spawning areas. The same could be done if the beavers damaged orchard trees or favoured crops such as sugar beet and carrots. As a last resort, the beavers could be relocated.”

Peter also accepts that beaver activity might prompt more

vegetation flowing downstream, which could block culverts and cause localised flooding. Again he says this could be managed.

“But who’s going to do all this management?” I ask.

“Us.”

“Who’s going to pay?”

“Us.”

SPREADING DISEASE?

Echinococcus multilocularis is a tapeworm that can cause a disease called echinococcosis, which is fatal in 9 out of 10 cases. It is not found in the UK but can be carried by beavers – hence the desire to trap and test the Devon colony. For a human to catch it, he or she would need to come into contact with the faeces of a dog that had become infected through scavenging a dead, infected beaver.

“You must really believe in them!”

“Beavers are a keystone species whose actions offer multiple benefits,” he replies. “A study by Scottish Natural Heritage shows that beavers’ pools (with plenty of woody material in them) act as refuges for vulnerable fish fry and generally improve a river’s fish stocks. Beavers’ felling activity also opens up banksides, letting light and life into rivers and that’s not just good for fish – butterflies, dragonflies and a host of creatures love riverside coppice woodland and meadow. Before the beavers, we would have about four clumps of frogspawn [in the captive project area]. We had 370 this year.”

Peter shows me how the DWT has put in sophisticated equipment to measure water and pollution flows in and out of the ‘test area’. It demonstrates how the beavers’ actions are keeping water in the



LEFT Perfect beaver habitat: an oxbow on the River Otter **BELOW** A beaver canal at the DWT's captive beaver project in west Devon **BOTTOM** Built from mud and woven sticks, this dam at the captive project is 1m high



OTHER BEAVER POPULATIONS IN BRITAIN

BEAVER REINTRODUCTION TRIAL: KNAPDALE

In 2004, a small group of beavers was introduced to the Knapdale area of Argyll in a controlled experiment – the Scottish Beaver Trial – to assess their impact on the ecology of the area. Since then, the beavers have bred and there are about 10 adults living wild. The trial has now ended and a decision about the beavers will be taken in 2015.

RIVER TAY

Up to 200 beavers live wild throughout the River Tay catchment area from accidental releases in the past decade or so. Scottish Natural Heritage has abandoned plans to trap and remove the population despite strong

pressure from landowners who claim the animals are causing substantial damage. The population is being monitored and a final decision about what to do with them will be taken in 2015.



woody meadows for far longer than in the surrounding pastoral and arable fields. “We’ve shown that this creates a steady year-round flow – with the potential to keep flash flooding to a minimum,” says Peter. “The dams also act as settling tanks and filter systems, removing pollution from the water. Several water companies have shown interest in how this works. It’s a far cheaper solution than trying to sort the problem downstream.”

It all sounds good but I am reminded of Mark Lloyd’s point that the beavers were introduced illegally: “there was no democratic decision taken with proper consultation with local people, businesses and landowners to seek their views.”

“We don’t know who was responsible for the wild beavers but we’re now holding regular public meetings with local people and landlords,” Peter replies. “The landowners are cautious,

waiting to see what happens on the Otter – and one or two can see the potential for beaver-watching ecotourism. Other locals are almost wholly in support. Of the 230 responses, 225 are in support. The public consultation is still open.”

Whatever happens, it’s sure to be a slow process. Defra is still keen to trap the wild beavers, test them for disease and, at time of going to press, was considering DWT’s application for the beavers to be returned to the wild. Even if Defra says yes, the DWT will have its work cut out convincing angling bodies that now is a good time to embrace the beaver.

In the meantime, the DWT will continue its project in the culm grasslands – and look for a wider water catchment in which to test the efficacy of the beaver.

Most curious of all, Peter pointed me to a recent article by beaver expert Derek Gow, which more than hinted that there are other beavers at large in England. And on the River Tay in Scotland, 200 beavers are living wild. Has the beaver dam already burst? ☞



Fergus Collins is editor of *BBC Countryfile Magazine* and is still to see a wild beaver in the UK.

Photo: Oliver Edwards, FLPA

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Bright stems of pollarded willows fringe the Winter Walk at Anglesey Abbey in Cambridgeshire – and snowdrops carpet the woodland in late winter too.



WINTER GARDEN WALKS

On a sparkling frosty day, why not explore one of our great winter gardens? **James Alexander-Sinclair** presents 10 of the best for seasonal colour, scent and spectacle

I reckon (and correct me if I am wrong) that if you're reading this fine magazine you are of a robust and sturdy disposition. Not for you a winter of hibernation and radiator-hugging: given the chance you would much rather be out there, feeling the wind on your cheeks, Jack Frost nipping at your nose and the crunch of frosted pathways beneath your boots.

However, rather than striding out over fell and dale, may I suggest a bit of garden visiting? Winter gardens have a lot to offer. Many of our finest landscape gardens offer walks through woodland and parkland that was designed and planted on a vast scale. Sweeping vistas punctuated by mature trees and interesting buildings are there to explore.

Most of our public gardens have planted things that look their very best at this time of year. There may not be plump borders but there are plants with beautiful bark, berries and stems. In a summer garden, there's an awful lot of distraction but, at this time of year, the few plants that are performing are bound to grab your attention. Flowers in winter gardens tend to be quite small but often have the most amazing scent, which carries a long way in the crisp winter air. So why not treat yourself to a few gardens: they may not be as challenging as pacing up a peak or marching along a ridge but they can be just as invigorating. And you are much more likely to get a decent slice of homemade cake at the end of the afternoon. ▶

Photo: National Trust Images



1. Pensthorpe Natural Park Norfolk

Piet Oudolf is probably the number one garden designer in the world at the moment. Among others, he is responsible for the High Line – a sensational park in New York created on the old elevated railway track. Here he has laid out his characteristic swathes of planting: on a frosty morning it will look spectral yet scintillating. The gardens are surrounded by acres of natural wetland landscape and woodland brimming with birds and sundry wildlife.
01328 851465,
www.pensthorpe.com

2. Anglesey Abbey Cambridgeshire

This is, I reckon, about the finest winter garden in the country. Loads of exciting plants full of texture and scent set alongside a generously proportioned pathway. Go right to the end of the path as there is a deeply wonderful surprise waiting for you. No, I am not going to tell you what it is: suffice to say that I saw it for the first time in the snow and was captivated. Perfect for a gentle winter amble.
01223 810080,
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/anglesey-abbey

3. Clumber Park Nottinghamshire

Clumber has the longest stretch of working glasshouse of any of the National Trust properties: it is a beautiful thing and is in the process of being painstakingly restored. After you have finished striding purposefully around the gardens and along the two-mile Lime Tree Avenue, drop in on the museum of garden tools where you can marvel at how our ancestors did all that digging with such extraordinarily heavy spades and discover the point of a cucumber straightener.
01909 544917, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/clumber-park

4. Painswick Rococo Garden Gloucestershire

I spent a week here in the summer and loved it – it is the sort of garden that I could imagine owning. Big but not ridiculously so, full of quirks and interesting corners, good fruit and, once you climb out of the valley, some gorgeous views. This was a garden designed almost 300 years ago for parties and it would be a pity to stop now. If you go in January, when the gardens reopen, the place will be carpeted with snowdrops.
01452 813204,
www.rococogarden.org.uk

5. Fountains Abbey, Yorkshire

If you catch Fountains in just the right light – maybe with a bit of early morning mist, or possibly as the sun sinks into an early sunset – then it looks not only ethereal but a little bit spooky. The ruined Cistercian abbey (the monks were booted out during the Reformation) is close to the Georgian gardens of Studley Royal, Fountains Hall and the old medieval deer park. Come back next October to sample the apples from the orchard.

01765 608888, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/fountains-abbey



6. Stowe Buckinghamshire

Walking boots on – there is a lot of landscape to see here. There's nothing that you would easily describe as a garden but lots of cleverly landscaped valleys studded with some of the finest garden buildings ever made: "Elysian fields? Certainly, sir, right down there by the Temple of Ancient Virtue." The gardens were laid out by such eminences as Capability Brown, William Kent, Charles Bridgman and John Vanbrugh and are not only majestic but also tell a great story.
01280 817156, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe

7. Dunham Massey Cheshire

Britain's largest winter garden is in Altrincham, just a stone's throw from Manchester. Many of the trees in the surrounding parkland were planted in the 1730s by the Earl of Warrington: they were paid for with the dowry of the unfortunate wealthy merchant's daughter who he married for her money. The Earl may have been a bounder but his trees look pretty amazing. The 300 acres of parkland boast a range of architectural oddities, fallow deer and fabulous walks.
0161 941 1025, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dunham-massey

8. Cambo Gardens Fife

Cambo has beautiful walks through the woodlands of oak, sycamore and ash, which take you along the burn to the sea, and are open every single day of the year. But if you want a special treat, then go when the snowdrops are flowering. In winter, the first emerge to greet you and before long, great swathes of nodding white flowers carpet the woodland floor. Just the thing to shake off the new year blues and set you on a course towards spring.
01333 450 054, www.camboestate.com

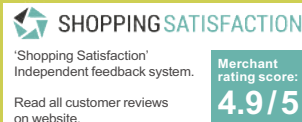
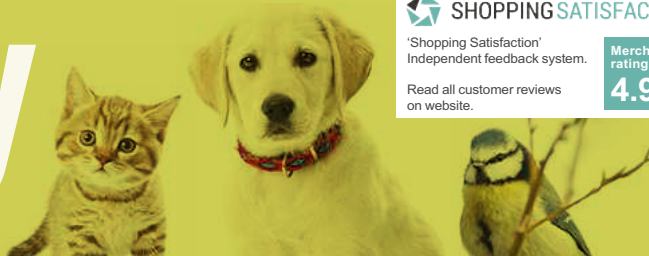
9. Bodnant Garden Conwy

With sprightly views of the River Conwy and the distant prospect of Snowdonia, this is one of the great gardens of Wales. The 80 acres offer both a more formal area up by the house and a wild garden further down the hill, towards the river. There are plants growing here from all over the world, collected by five generations of the Aberconway family. And perched above the river Hiraethlyn, there is a building called The Poem, which has to be a good thing.
01492 650460, www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden

Photos: National Trust Images, Alamy, GAP

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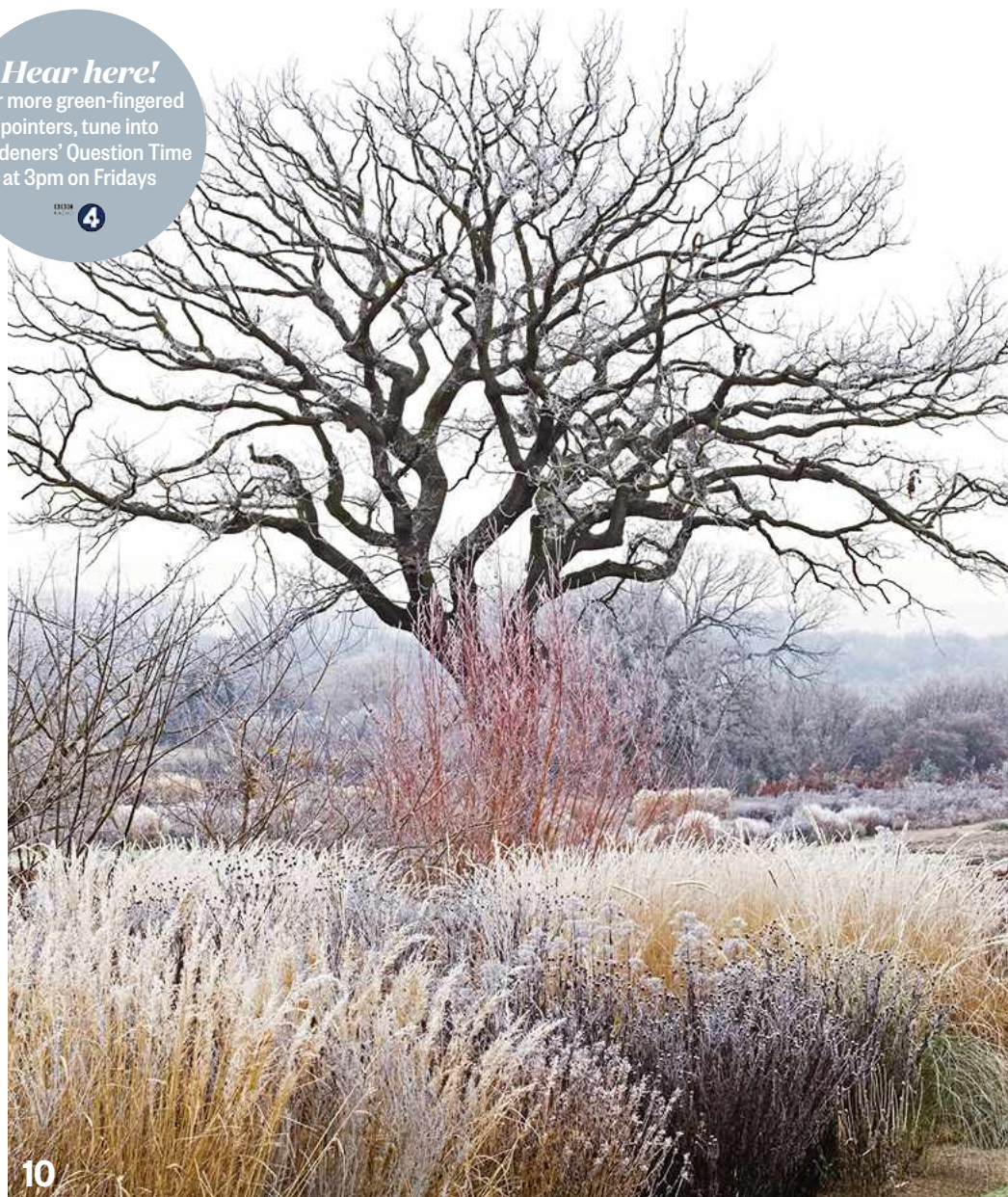
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Hear here!

For more green-fingered pointers, tune into Gardeners' Question Time at 3pm on Fridays



10. RHS Wisley Surrey

This is the flagship garden of the Royal Horticultural Society: 60 acres of planty happiness, with something going on every day of the year. There are deep borders stuffed with striking wintery stems and berries. If the weather gets too hideous then there are some excellent cafes and a huge and exciting glasshouse, showcasing a world-class plant collection. All the RHS gardens are also very strong on activities designed to both educate and amuse children.

0845 260 9000, www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/wisley



BBC James Alexander-Sinclair is a regular BBC presenter who works as a garden designer.

He was a judge at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2014.

FIVE WINTER PLANTS FOR YOUR GARDEN

see www.countryfile.com for five more!



DOGWOOD
Cornus alba

In summer, the leaves are unremarkable and the flowers are tiny. However, once the leaves have fallen, the new stems are as red as Santa's coat and sparkle in the watery winter light.



GHOST BRAMBLE
Rubus thibetanus

Brambles aren't usually associated with winter. The blackberries are gone and all that is left is the prickles. But this ghost bramble has wonderful white stems that stand out well amid the gloom.



CHERRY
Prunus serrula

If a plant has no leaves, berries or flowers, then what's makes it stand out? Bark, of course. This small tree has beautiful conker-brown bark that looks as if it has been buffed by an energetic drill sergeant.



WITCH HAZEL
Hamamelis mollis

Lightens any winter day. Its odd-looking flowers, with petals like paper streamers, come in yellow, orange or red, depending on variety. It flowers before the leaves appear and smells of spiced boudoirs.



WINTERSWEET
Chimonanthus praecox
'Luteus'

You know when it's present as the scent is sultry and carries a long way. Loads of creamy yellow flowers are followed by handsome vase-shaped seed capsules.



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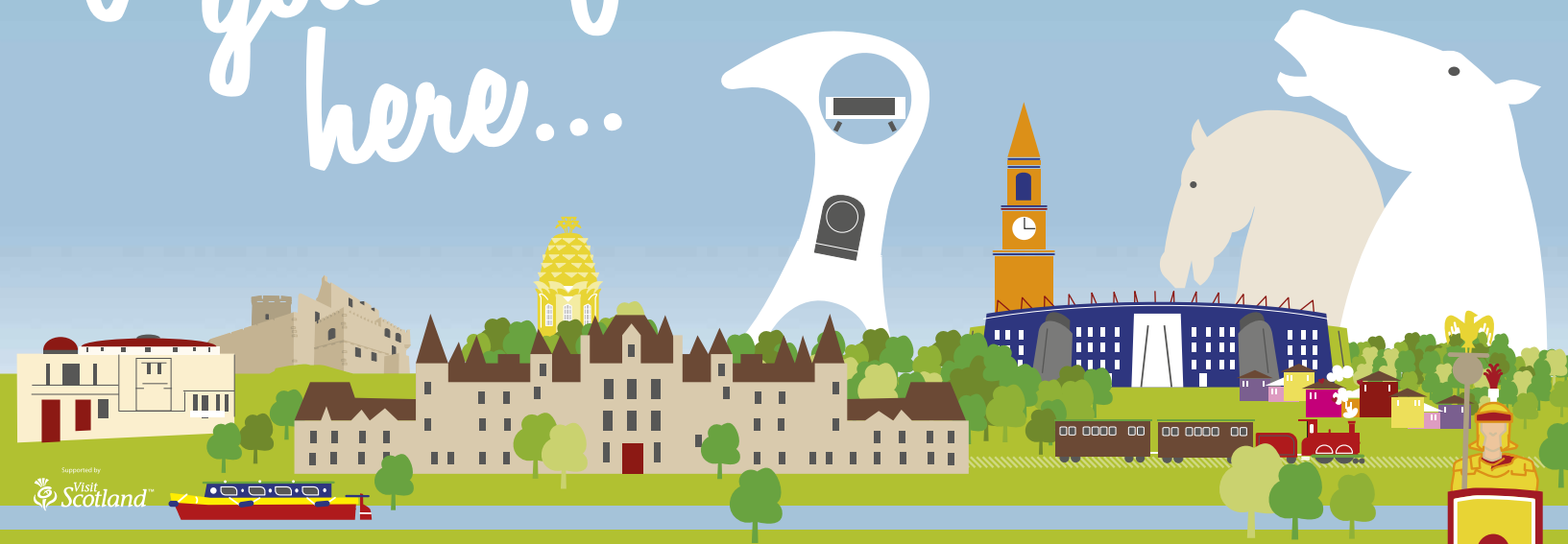
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COUNTRY FITNESS

RUNNING WILD

The wind in your hair, the moor at your feet – and it's a great way to get in shape. Why not tick off a New Year's resolution by taking up off-road running in the great outdoors? **James Witts** reports

It is late October and I'm at my parents' home in Exeter. "Forecast's lovely tomorrow," says Mum. "You'll love running on the moors." Twenty hours later I'm in fog so thick, Conan Doyle's gigantic hound could be in panting distance and I wouldn't see a thing.

"Typical Dartmoor," says Ceri Rees, of south Devon-based Wild Running. "It's famous for its micro-climate." Under Ceri's expert tutelage, I'm here to investigate the growing interest in off-road running.

It's a branch of an already popular sport. According to Sport England, the number of people running regularly has increased by a third since 2005. Close to two million of us are striding out for at least 30 minutes every week, for fitness or to lose a bit of weight.

Running's popularity is not surprising. Apart from giving you the body beautiful, it's the cheapest fitness activity around – all you need is a decent pair of shoes. It can be done anywhere. And it's time-efficient – just slip into those shoes and you're off.



Running off-road has a long history – see our timeline on page 59 – and interest has never been stronger. New events are springing up all over the country – and established ones, such as the Sodbury Slog and the Surrey-based G3 series, are selling out quicker than ever.

RUNNING FOR MORTALS

But isn't off-road running strictly for the super-fit? I tend to think of fell runners in string vests, with physiques chiseled from granite – runners such as Joss Naylor, a Lakeland sheep farmer who, even at the age of 70, was able to run 50 miles in 21 hours, reaching 70 Lakeland fell tops. So a pretty exclusive club. “Not at all,” says Ceri. “Yes, there are the hardcore ultra-runners [who race over marathon distance], but their numbers are matched by newcomers coming from events like the 5km Park Runs. With some navigational know-how, it's open to all.”

And it certainly has its rewards. However pleasant the pockets of greenery in our

towns and cities, there's nothing like running in the countryside for sheer beauty and sense of freedom. Part of the enjoyment of off-road running, especially with a friend, is that you can take your time, have a bit of a chat, enjoy the spectacular landscape and the tranquility, far from traffic and crowds.

Ceri reckons off-road runs should involve some navigational self-sufficiency too – going off the beaten track. The freedom to decide where to run once you're out and about is part of the fun of it. “In the UK you're never far from a patch of wild, even in London.” The only limits to off-road running are access issues – as governed by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

HOW TO RUN OFF-ROAD

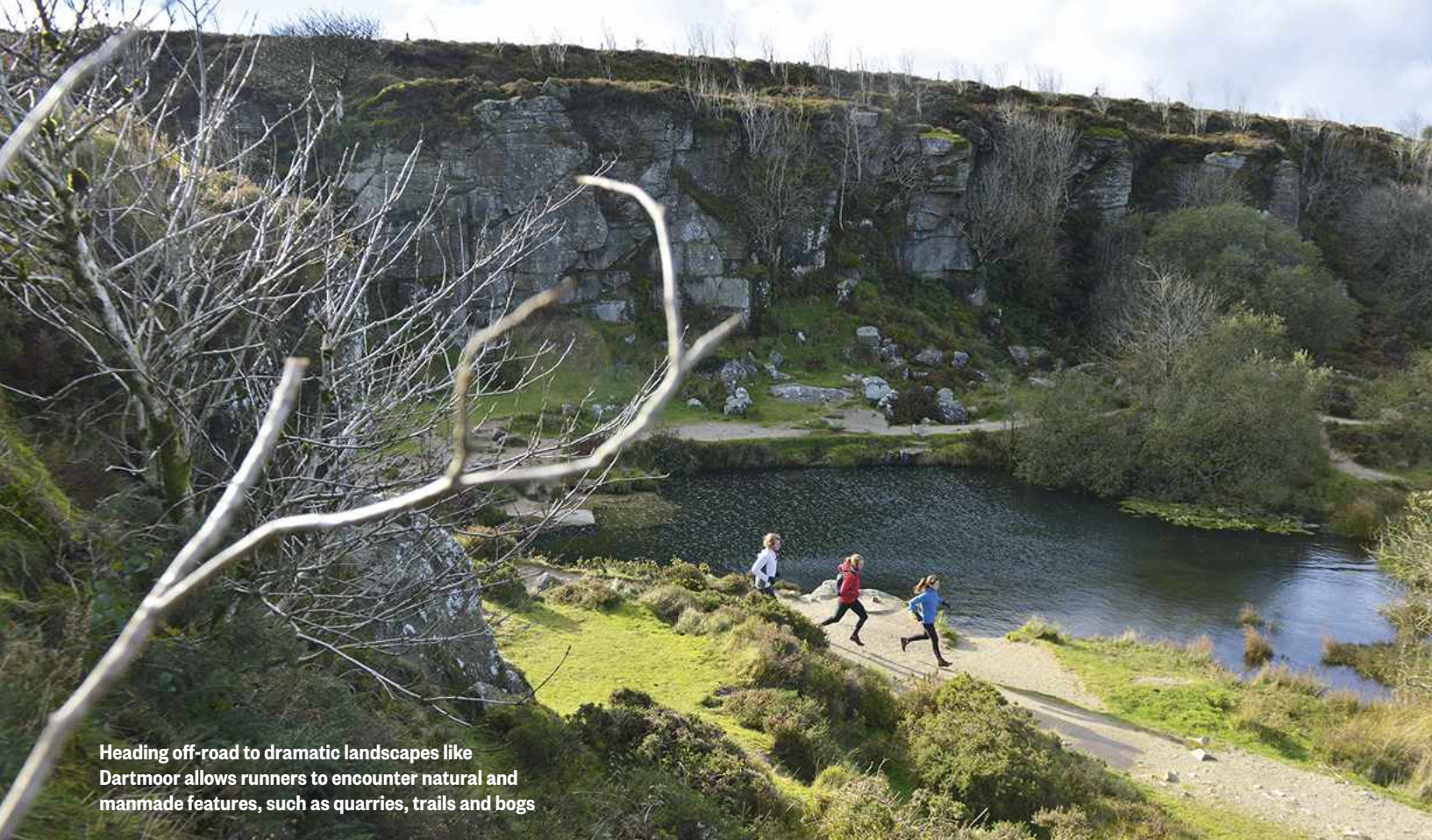
Thankfully, by the time we've had a shot of coffee in Princetown's Fox Tor Café, the fog has lifted to reveal a flowing landscape of golden yellow and chestnut brown. You can't beat an autumnal moorland. But you ➤

“TAKE YOUR TIME, HAVE A BIT OF A CHAT, ENJOY THE SPECTACULAR LANDSCAPE AND THE TRANQUILITY”



Taking it in their stride: James, regular fell runner Miriam and instructor Ceri dart across the moors

Photo: Jon Brooke



Heading off-road to dramatic landscapes like Dartmoor allows runners to encounter natural and manmade features, such as quarries, trails and bogs

can be injured on it, so I listen to instructions. “When trail running, it’s important to keep your eyes focused roughly six strides ahead,” says Ceri. “This enables you to choose the smoothest and safest way forward.”

There are also essential techniques to adopt when conquering the hills. While ascending, do your best to relax and feel like you’re breathing from your lower abdomen rather than high in your lungs. If that’s hard to imagine, try it out on your next run. If you can do that, you’re less likely to reach the top of the hill completely out of breath. And you’ll need that energy to gain momentum for when you descend. “I’d recommend keeping your body perpendicular to the ground when running downhill,” says Ceri. “Your hips should nestle over your ankles, so there’s less impact. You have a natural wider arm action when running downhill and remember: the steeper the hill, the shorter the stride.”

AND WE’RE OFF...

With Ceri’s advice in mind, soon I am running through terrain comprising a raw mix of jagged granite splinters, thick layers of peat and miles of quarry tracks. We’re heading toward Merrivale, until the 1990s one of the biggest active quarries on the moor. “Granite from here

ESSENTIAL KIT

It’s worth bringing a **rucksack**. If your trail run heads to rugged land, such as Dartmoor, conditions can change quickly. That, coupled with fluctuations in intensity caused by the lie of the land, means you may need to change more often than a Parisian catwalk model.

On you, or in your bag, should be: a **showerproof jacket**; **run tights**; **long-sleeve top**; a **head torch**, just in case; **nutrition and water**; and a **compass and map**. You can get away with normal trainers but we’d suggest **off-road shoes**. They’re more durable, have better grip and may have a waterproof membrane, too. I’d recommend Inov-8’s X-Talon 212s (£95, www.inov-8.com).



was used to build the prison, the British Museum – and Nelson’s Column,” says Ceri.

All this history distracts me from the bog I’ve just squelched in... but soon my soaked feet are in their stride, leaping over streams and zig-zagging through grass and heather. My heart is pumping but so is the adrenaline, a thrilling sensation heightened by the stunning backdrop.

Dartmoor covers 954 square kilometres, and from Cox Tor – or one of the 160 granite tops on the moor – it feels like you can see every single centimetre. On a clear day, anyway. But despite the mist, there’s a sense of achievement on reaching the top. There’s also a sense of perspective. Suddenly the stresses of everyday life seem irrelevant. The bogs seem to absorb that mind clutter, leaving you to run on with enthusiasm.

WHY IT’S GOOD FOR YOU

When our run reaches the turnaround point at Merrivale, I feel quite different to my normal road runs. “That’s because off-road running uses more muscles,” says Ceri. “Every footfall is different, meaning you employ a much wider range of muscles.

That’s why it’s a better workout and you’re less likely to pick up an overuse-injury such as a stress fracture or shin splints.” Sure enough, the relatively soft moorland is more forgiving on my old



RUN WITH THE EXPERTS

You can run off-road alone but for companionship and navigational guidance, and especially when new to the sport, these three respected outfits will ensure a safe and stimulating entrance...

WILD RUNNING (www.wildrunning.co.uk)

Our man Ceri Rees offers guided runs over Dartmoor and the South West Coastal Path; weekly evening off-piste runs along the trails of the South Hams; and camps in Devon and Scotland.

RUN SNOWDONIA (www.runsnowdonia.co.uk)

The team caters for all levels of fitness, whether you're training for the debilitating Welsh 3000ers Challenge – 30 miles, 2,800m ascent, 15 peaks, 24 hours – or Snowdonia-based social runs.

JELLEY LEGS (www.jelleylegs.co.uk)

Guided runs over the Yorkshire Dales await with B&B offered, too. And if the worst happens, you can take some comfort from your guide, Dave Jelley, holding a Masters degree in rehabilitation!



RACE DAY!

If you've never run a race before, the thought of running with others might give you the heebie-jeebies but the running crowd is friendly, supportive and always ready to offer advice – and races can be enormous fun. Signing up for a race gives you a goal that will motivate you to keep training.

• A good way to try off-road running is the weekly free Park Runs. These 5km races take place in pleasant parklands. Find out more at www.parkrun.org.uk

• The Fell Runners Association publishes details of hundreds of races each year. www.fellrunner.org.uk

> For information about other off-road races see www.countryfile.com

running injury, which was caused by high-impact forces though the lower limbs.

This brave new world of injury-free running sends my limbs into overdrive, a smile on my increasingly rosy visage. The euphoria is short-lived, though. The next thing I know I've tumbled to the ground, legs collapsing and arms flailing.

"Of course, tripping over is a risk with any off-road sport," says Ceri. "You also have to be mindful of energy levels." Cue our return to the Fox Tor Café. By the time we'd ordered one large breakfast and one small – I can see why Ceri's a marathon winner and I'm not – we'd been out about three hours and covered about eight miles of rolling terrain.

Ceri and guides like him can cater these navigational courses and off-road running trips to suit your ability and experience. The cost is £45 – for which I've learnt how to navigate and run off-road, improved my fitness, had a history lesson and made a fine friend. Yes, you can walk the same terrain and that's a wonderful thing, but I'd argue you discover more about yourself – and the country you inhabit – by running. ☺



James Witts completed his first half marathon in 2003 and has been on the run ever since. He's taking his newly found off-road skills to the Grizzly on 1 March 2015 – a 20-miler starting from Seaton. Please pray for him!

Photos: Jon Brooks, Alamy, Corbis

TIMELINE

1064 AD The first recorded fell run takes place in Braemar, Scotland, held by King Malcolm III.

C. 1850 The first Grasmere Guides Race – 1.5 miles over Grey Craggs. It now attracts thousands of runners every August.

1876 First English cross-country championships.

1932 Keswick guest-house owner Bob Graham (1889-1966) runs 42 Lakeland fells in 24 hours. From 1960 his achievement is remembered as the Bob Graham Round, with runners vying to setting new records.

1966 American Bill Bowerman's book *Jogging* triggers the craze for road running.



1970 Fell Runners Association is founded.



1975 Lakeland sheep farmer Joss Naylor (above) runs 72 peaks, more than 100 miles and 11,500m of ascent in 23 hrs 20 mins.

2011 Nicky Spinks sets the women's record for the Bob Graham Round – 64 peaks in just 23 hrs 15 mins.

2014: Steve Birkinshaw, 45, runs all of Alfred Wainwright's 214 peaks in six days, 13 hrs.

2014: Leeds teacher Emma Clayton (pictured) leads the British team to silver medal at the World Mountain Running Championships in Italy.





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BBC COUNTRYFILE MAGAZINE AWARDS 2014/15

Welcome to our annual awards celebrating the countryside

This year we have 12 categories, ranging from Rural Pub of the Year to Greatest National Park. To whittle down contenders in various categories, we asked an expert in that field to provide us with their nominations. So you'll find Chris Packham nominating the five greatest nature reserves, or Visit Britain nominating five British places that warrant the title of Landmark of the Year.

Now we need you! Vote for your favourite in each category, and the winners will be crowned in the April issue. To vote, either fill in the form at the end and post it to us, go online to www.countryfile.com/awards2014-15, or send an email with your selections to awards@countryfile.com. *Happy voting!*



**Cast
your
vote!**



1. HERITAGE SITE OF THE YEAR

Nominated by Jules Hudson

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM CAMBRIDGESHIRE

One of my favourite museums, and the hub of the Imperial War Museum's large-scale conservation team. On my last visit they were hard at work on the Red Baron's engine, Rudolf Hess's Messerschmitt and the field gun that fired the British Army's first shot in the First World War. An Aladdin's cave of wartime history.

SEVERN VALLEY RAILWAY WORCESTERSHIRE

The Severn Valley steam railway (bottom left) between Kidderminster and Bridgenorth has a fantastic conservation element to it, running an apprenticeship scheme for young engineers in order to keep the traditional skills alive. Travelling by steam train is also a wonderful way to see the spectacular surrounding countryside.

KEW PALACE SURREY

Kew Palace previously languished as a backwater in the grounds of Kew Gardens in Richmond. However, an extensive conservation programme has preserved this beautiful Georgian building, warts and all, and it is now accessible to all those visiting the gardens. It's worth sparing a

thought too for poor old King George III, confined here for much of his illness.

AVEBURY WILTSHIRE

Often overlooked by neighbouring Stonehenge, the stone circle at Avebury (top left) is all the more tangible because it is readily accessible. Here you can marvel at a prehistoric world that's as mysterious as it is beautiful and explore the wider landscape and component sites such as

Silbury Hill, the Sanctuary and West Kennet long barrow.

PORTMEIRION NORTH WALES

This Italianate village (below) is the brainchild of Clough Williams-Ellis, who bought a slice of coastline upon which to realise his creative ambitions. For nearly a century, what would appear to be an incongruous collection of buildings and styles has inspired architects all around the world. ▶





2. HOLIDAY DESTINATION OF THE YEAR

Nominated by *Lonely Planet Traveller* (www.lonelyplanet.com/magazine)



LAKE DISTRICT

This glorious corner of England's north west has been an inspiration for artists and poets throughout the ages, famed for centuries for the beauty of its lakes, mountains and fells. It offers wonderful hillwalking and watersports, not to mention a treasure trove of restaurants and inns.

YORKSHIRE

With its rolling valleys, timeless villages and wild moors, it's no wonder Yorkshire is known as God's Own County. Explore this wide-ranging stretch of the north, from the home of the Brontës in Haworth to the windswept coastline around Whitby (see left) where, arguably, Britain's finest fish and chips await the visitor.

OUTER HEBRIDES

Taking its name from the old Norse for 'islands at the edge of the sea', this island chain stands at the UK's northwestern frontier. There are more than 100 sparsely inhabited islands, characterised by craggy hills, grassy dunes and white-sand beaches – offering encounters with puffins, seals, whales and dolphins.

ISLES OF SCILLY

From classic British scenery to spectacular sub-tropical gardens and waters that wouldn't look out of place in the Caribbean, the Isles of Scilly are unique (above right). Just attempting to reach the southernmost point of the British Isles is half the adventure of visiting.

WEST SUSSEX

An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the South Downs (above left) form the UK's newest National Park. Arundel, with its fairytale castle, is a good base from which to explore, while the broad and blustery sweep of sand at West Wittering is perfect for a British seaside holiday.



3. WILDLIFE SUCCESS STORY OF THE YEAR

Nominated by *BBC Wildlife Magazine* (www.discoverwildlife.com)



OTTER

The otter's recovery continues, due to a decline in water pollution and persecution and thanks to river and wetland restoration. It is fast re-colonising former lowland haunts from which it had long vanished.

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE

Riding high in Scotland's Highlands and islands after one of the most successful reintroduction schemes of recent decades. This year is the 30th anniversary of the first successful breeding by reintroduced birds.

RED SQUIRREL

In 2014 this species showed evidence of recovery, expanding its range in Cumbria, Northumberland and the Scottish Highlands. Huge efforts have been made to

control non-native greys and there are signs that some red squirrels in Lancashire are developing immunity to the deadly 'pox' transmitted by greys.

HAZEL DORMOUSE

Survey data from the National Dormouse Monitoring Programme suggests that this handsome rodent (left) has at last turned the corner in Britain – and in some areas, such as Kent, may even be thriving.

LARGE BLUE BUTTERFLY

This gorgeous insect became extinct in Britain in 1979 and, due to its complex life-cycle and habitat requirements, its reintroduction has been fiendishly complex. Large blues are now thriving at a handful of grassland sites in the South West.



4. YEAR'S BEST COUNTRY BOOK

Nominated by Fergus Collins

H IS FOR HAWK by Helen MacDonald

Stirring account of trying to train a goshawk against a background of family tragedy.

ENGEL'S ENGLAND by Matthew Engel

A quest for local identity through a hilarious tour of England's 39 historic counties.

MEADOWLAND by John Lewis-Stempel

An enchanting year of immersion in a wildlife-rich meadow.

THE MOOR by William Atkins

A brilliant examination of the power of uplands – weaving history with modern controversy.

WALKERS GUIDE TO TRACKS AND SIGNS by Tristan Gooley

Charming journey of discovery: how to read the landscape and its wildlife.

SEASONS by Nick Groom

Expert insight into why we need to connect more closely with the seasons and traditions associated with them.



5. GREATEST NATIONAL PARK

- PEAK DISTRICT
- LAKE DISTRICT
- SNOWDONIA
- DARTMOOR
- PEMBROKESHIRE COAST
- NORTH YORK MOORS
- YORKSHIRE DALES
- EXMOOR
- NORTHUMBERLAND
- BRECON BEACONS
- THE BROADS
- NEW FOREST
- SOUTH DOWNS



6. NATURE RESERVE OF THE YEAR

Nominated by Chris Packham

RSPB MINSMERE SUFFOLK

The 'Disneyland' of bird reserves, because it has so much in terms of habitats, species and facilities including many rarities and 'super birds'! A family-friendly must.

WWT LONDON WETLAND CENTRE LONDON

A triumph of conservation, going from nothing to the best urban reserve in Europe in just a few years and accessible to millions.

MARTIN DOWN NNR WILTSHIRE

A fabulous stretch of old England with great botany and butterflies. The best picnic site in the UK, with the chance of spotting Montagu's harriers.

WOOLSTON EYES RESERVE WARRINGTON

A post-industrial gem, this oasis in the tangled wreckage of the 'manscape' comes



complete with beautiful black-necked grebes and a fabulous team of volunteers. To visit, a booking is required.

THE BASS ROCK, C/O THE SCOTTISH SEABIRD CENTRE NORTH BERWICK

In summer, this gannet-capped island becomes the most exciting birding spectacle in the UK. The Seabird Centre has a video link but a boat trip gives you the essential smell experience, too!



7. LANDMARK OF THE YEAR

Nominated by Visit Britain (www.visitbritain.com)

LLANDDWYN ISLAND LIGHTHOUSE ANGLESEY

Named after St Dwynwen, patron saint of lovers, this magical spot is THE place for a romantic stroll on the All Wales Coast Path.

THE KELPIES FALKIRK

Scotland's largest piece of public art, by Andy Scott, named after mythical water horses, is a monument to Scotland's horse-powered heritage (see below, right).

DARK HEDGES ARMOY

Planted 200 years ago along the drive to Gracehill House, this avenue of beeches is

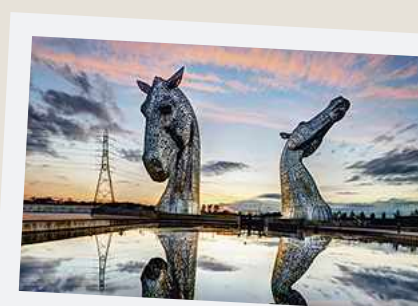
much photographed and even features in the HBO series *Game of Thrones*.

SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHPLACE TRUST STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

The 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth was in 2014 and every fan of the Bard should visit his home once in their lifetime.

HAREWOOD HOUSE LEEDS

The Grand Départ of the Tour de France in 2014 was at the splendid Harewood House near Leeds. The sight of the riders raring to go, with the 18th-century country house as their backdrop, was truly memorable. ➤





8. GARDEN OF THE YEAR

Nominated by **BBC Gardeners' World Magazine**
(www.gardenersworld.com/magazine)

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS EDINBURGH

One of the world's finest botanic gardens, with a diverse collection of plants within its 70 acres. In its glasshouses are rare, exotic and amazing plants, such as ancient cycads, giant waterlilies, bamboos and orchids.

ALNWICK GARDEN NORTHUMBERLAND

This innovative contemporary garden is a full day experience in every season, from its garden of poisonous plants and treetop walkways to its roses and towering delphiniums. Water is its lifeblood, with pools, fountains and the Grand Cascade, the largest water feature of its kind in the UK.

TRENTHAM GARDENS STAFFORD

Revived with huge imagination in the past few years, this has become one of the

country's must-see gardens (below right). It mixes high-end design with family-friendly fairy trails and woodland walks.

KEW GARDENS SURREY

This 300-acre World Heritage Site landscape is home to the largest collection of living plants on the planet. With tropical treasures, cacti, orchids and giant waterlilies plus the 18m-high treetop walkway, it's the world's garden on our doorstep.

THE LOST GARDENS OF HELIGAN CORNWALL

An atmospheric step back in time creating an inspiring day out. Discover a living history of Victorian gardeners, at work and play, evoked through 200 acres of restored walled vegetable gardens, sub-tropical exotic jungle, wildlife habitats and pleasure grounds (below left).



10. OUTDOOR BRAND OF THE YEAR



Nominated by
Outdoors Magic
(www.outdoorsmagic.com)

BERGHAUS

A huge range of hill and mountain kit from jackets to boots and packs. Innovates with ground-breaking technologies such as water-resistant Hydrodown. www.berghaus.com

BRASHER

The Brasher brand is about to disappear, but its leather boots will carry on under Berghaus. It's a bittersweet end to 36-odd years of British walking footwear. www.brasheer.co.uk

PARAMO

As well as its Nikwax Analogy waterproof fabric system, Paramo has upped its game with more modern styles and is committed to ethical manufacture. www.paramo.co.uk

OSPREY

A range of packs, from urban commuting to backcountry skiing, marked by a combination of impressive quality and innovation. www.ospreyeurope.com/gb_en/

VANGO

Reasonably priced, sturdy tents, as supplied to the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The inflatable AirBeam technology allows quick and easy pitching of large family and car-camping tents. www.vango.co.uk



9. BEACH OF THE YEAR

Nominations by **Surfers Against Sewage** (www.sas.org.uk)



SENNEN CORNWALL

This beach (left) is blessed with beautiful white sands, crystal clear waters and ample facilities. Dolphins, basking sharks and whales share waves with swimmers.

EOROPIE ISLE OF LEWIS

One of the UK's most remote beaches with empty white sands and crystal clear blue waters, surrounded by beautiful walks.

WHITESANDS PEMBROKESHIRE

Overlooked by the craggy hill Carn Llidi, this beach has plenty of rock pools to explore and great coastal walks, while its

fantastic panoramas, white sands, green seas and beautiful sunsets steal the show.

SCARBOROUGH NORTH YORKSHIRE

This resort town has kept the features that made it popular in Victorian times. A castle overlooks two lovely beaches, with donkey rides, fish and chips and a sealife centre.

PORTRUSH NORTHERN IRELAND

Much of this bustling seaside town is built on a peninsula. It has several golden beaches, the people are welcoming and the stunning Giant's Causeway is nearby. ➤

PARADISE ISLAND ESCAPE

karma st martin's

Reopening for the season on 1 May 2015, Karma St. Martin's in the Cornish Scilly Isles offers a warmer welcome than most UK luxury family island resorts, owing to its location 30 miles west from the Cornish coast, meaning this paradise archipelago registers an average six degrees warmer than the UK mainland year around.

It is the relative warmth that gives these beautiful islands their indigenous flora and fauna, which Karma Group sustainably harvests to create bespoke products and used by expert therapists in the resort's state of the art spa to generate a unique sense of well-being. Included in the luxury products are indigenous seaweeds, wild lavender chamomile and sea salt.

Nestled on approximately 2.8 hectares of sloping terrain, surrounded by high ground and two granite hill cairns, on the south-western shore of St. Martin's,

Karma St. Martin's, the island's only hotel, capitalises on breathtaking panoramic coastal vistas overlooking the deep azure waters of Tean Sound and Tresco.

For active pursuits, guests can also go for a dip in the resort's indoor heated swimming pool, work-out in a nearby gym, play tennis, swim and snorkel with seals off the island's crystal clear waters, or, simply indulge in nature rambles or bird-spotting and soak up the fresh, sea-scented air with leisurely walks or bicycle rides around the island, which is just two miles in length and six miles in circumference.

CONTACT:

Karma st. Martin's, Isles of Scilly,

Lower Town, St Martin's, TR25 0QW

Email: st.martins@karmaresorts.com

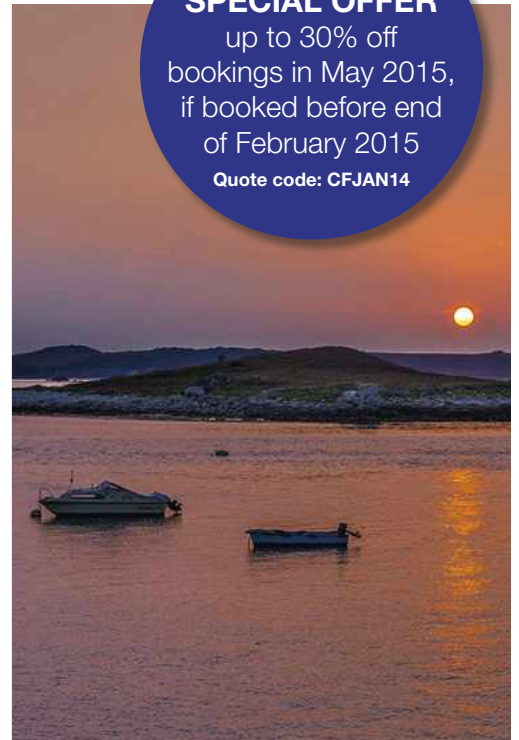
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11. READER PHOTO OF THE YEAR

Reader photos of the month from the past year



1. Lancashire rainbow Nick Jackson



2. Catching a few rays Eve Russell



3. Abounding joy Ray Hutcheon



4. Double vision Iain Fazackerley



5. Pecking time Roland Edwards



6. Mud bath Gill Kennett



7. Making an entrance Louise Gibbon



8. Small swallow Debbie Debo



9. Widespread wonder Lucy Boak



10. In bloom Roy Cutts



11. Still water Martin Thirkettle



12. You ain't seen me, right? Hilary Chambers



12. RURAL PUB OF THE YEAR

Nominated by CAMRA (www.camra.org.uk)



SURREY OAK NEWDIGATE, SURREY

An attractive 16th-century Surrey inn committed to real ale, with low beams, flagstones and an inglenook fireplace. In the large garden there are boules pistes, and a skittle alley in the barn.

THE PILOT SWANSEA, GLAMORGAN

A welcoming local on the Mumbles' seafront, home to Mumbles Brewing Company. This 1849 pub is next to the coastal path and popular with lifeboatmen, locals, real ale fans, walkers and cyclists. Six ales are always available, including three or four from the pub brewery.

THE SALUTATION INN HAM, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

This rural gem in the Severn Valley is within walking distance of the Jenner Museum, Berkley Castle and Deer Park and boasts an inspired selection of ales and eight real ciders and perries. The pub has two cosy bars with a log fire and a skittles alley.

THE WINDMILL SEVENOAKS, KENT

The homely interior features wooden settles, a log-burning stove, etched windows, an excellent selection of ales and ciders, a good menu and a quiet, colourful garden.

THE JOHN BULL ALNWICK, NORTHUMBERLAND

This 180-year-old inn has a vast range of cask-conditioned ales, real cider, whiskey

and bottled Belgian beers. Darts teams compete in the local league and the pub has a traditional annual leek show.

STEAM PACKET INN ISLE OF WHITHORN, DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY

This historic harbourside hotel welcomes locals, visitors, families and pets. The public bar has stone walls and a multi-fuel stove, and is decorated with pictures of the village and maritime events.

THE FRESHFIELD FORMBY, MERSEYSIDE

A great community local, this shabby chic pub has a wide variety of ales, good food, a real open fire and a pretty courtyard. Staff are genial and dogs are welcome.

PRINCE OF WALES FOXFIELD, CUMBRIA

A splendid pub with guest ales from the two house breweries plus many others.

FIVE BELLS WICKHAM, BERKSHIRE

A 17th-century thatched village pub steeped in character, with nine regularly changing real ales and ciders.

THE HAREWOOD ARMS BROADBOTTOM, CHESHIRE

Warmed by open fires, this large community pub with the Green Mill brewery in its cellar has a friendly atmosphere, pool table and elevated darts area. ☺

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1. Heritage site of the year



2. Holiday destination of the year




3. Wildlife success story of the year



4. Year's best country book



5. Greatest national park of the year



6. Nature reserve of the year



7. Landmark of the year



8. Garden of the year



9. Beach of the year



10. Outdoor brand of the year



11. Reader photo of the year



12. Rural pub of the year





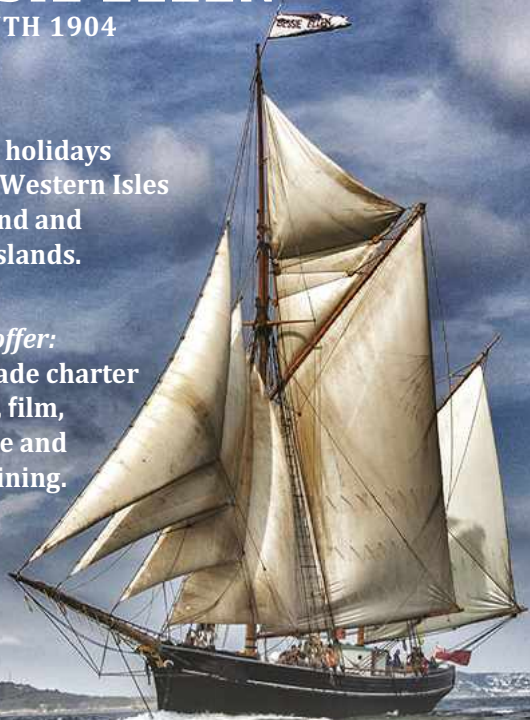
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January

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ADVENTURES IN THE LANDSCAPE

From wandering under a waterfall to sailing a tall ship, make 2015 the year you get out and experience the countryside in a new way



Behold the beautiful Sgwd yr Eira (Welsh for 'fall of snow') waterfall in the Brecon Beacons - see page 80

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Your handy guide to this month's Great Day Out

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01 CROSS A DESERT KENT

Dungeness, Britain's only desert, is an odd, derelict and disarming landscape, says **Maria Hodson**. There's far more going on than first meets the eye... Photos: Oliver Edwards



Dungeness is an amazing place. Really peculiar. It strikes the observer as a half-finished story that doesn't quite add up and therefore intrigues. There are tones of washed-up English seaside, of American frontier town, of mooncape and post-apocalyptic wasteland. It is, in short, wonderfully weird.

It's not an obvious tourist destination. There it lurks on the outcrop of headland on Britain's most south-easterly point, with a nuclear power station hulking in the corner. It is an isolated, otherworldly spot, where an immense stretch of shingle is spattered with beach shacks and skeletal boats. Abandoned artifacts stand lonely in the shattered stones like wasted sculptures. Here you spot a rusting train engine, here a slim boardwalk, here a fish hut that may or may not have been open recently. There is evidence of human habitation – a battered pick-up truck, rusting disused tools – but no sign of its current presence. There is an odd

silvery beauty to it all, especially in winter, when its haunting sense of melancholy is matched by the cool thin hues of the season. Even the name sounds dramatic and mildly sinister: Dungeness...

JUST DESERTS

On the day I visit, Dungeness veers between mild sunshine, downpour and early darkness – an apt reflection of its mutable character. How it appears depends on how you see it – but

“Its haunting sense of melancholy matches the cool hues of the season”

there is a wealth of discovery here, if viewed in the right light.

Among its claims to singularity is the fact that it's the only place in Britain classed as desert by the Met Office, due to its lack of freshwater and surface vegetation. Perched directly on the English Channel, Dungeness owns the largest area of shingle

in Europe, if not the world.

Scattered along the single road are small beach houses. Several are former railway carriages and project a solitary air despite squatting relatively near one another. An atmosphere of comfortable decay prevails. Random items are left in artful disarray outside the dwellings – whether deliberate or accidental is hard to tell. Who lives in these, I wonder. Families or individuals? Is there a strong community?

And where is everyone?

PROSPECTING
Late filmmaker Derek Jarman's Prospect Cottage

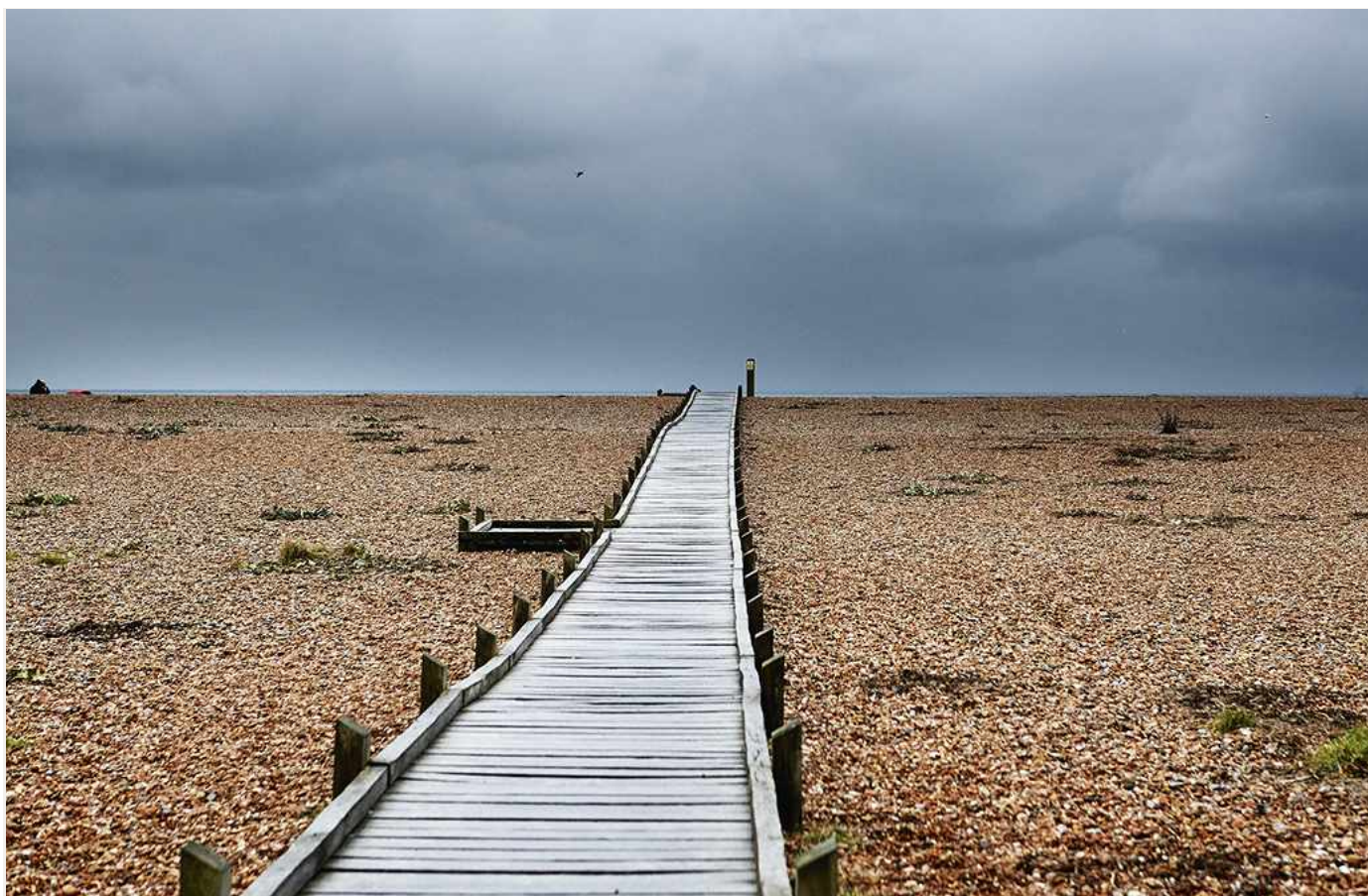
appears, identifiable by its black body and bright yellow frames, and inscription of John Donne's poem 'The Sun Rising' on one side. Jarman's garden is widely visited and appealing even in winter – stone circles, jutting sculptures and planted vegetation burst intermittently amid the shingle, reflecting the offbeat surroundings.

The busy old sun slows down and dark clouds gather as I move onwards to the lighthouse, one of five in the area. The Old Lighthouse is actually the fourth to be built on the site, in 1901, and, at 143 feet high, is one of the highest in the UK. It ceased operating in 1960 but visitors can climb to the top to see the panorama of Romney Marsh – although today, it's not open. Neither is the tiny station, along whose narrow gauge lines runs the miniature Romney, Hythe





ABOVE A weatherbeaten wooden boat in the shingle outside Prospect Cottage, formerly owned by late filmmaker Derek Jarman **BELOW** “We’re on a road to nowhere” ... the boardwalk runs over shingle almost to the shore **OPPOSITE PAGE** Skeletal houses and boats dot the landscape





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP An abandoned shack and boat; paintbrush, stick and grass art; fishing lines on the shore.



PILOT'S LIGHT

The Pilot is a comfortable pub sat a stone's throw from the sea, whose warm welcome belies its darker history. In 1633, smugglers lured a Spanish vessel aground here before murdering the crew and stealing the cargo of spirits. The ship's timbers were used to build the pub, and some remain in the building today. Don't let this put you off – its fish and chips and Dungeness fish pie are to die for... www.thepilotdungeness.co.uk

and Dymchurch railway. This tiny steam train, a third the size of a normal train, covers 13½ miles from Hythe to Dungeness and is a popular attraction.

ART IMITATING LIFE

A small artist's studio is marked by a thatch of paintbrushes upturned in the ground. Nearby lies an artful heap of jelly shoes and colourful paraphernalia. "Is this your work?" I ask a man emerging from the cottage, the first person I've seen. "No, it's just a collection of sea junk," he replies. "If I was Tracey Emin, it would be art, but I'm not." He tells me he has lived here for 32 years, so I ask about the area. He says it's a mix of individuals and families who have been here for years, although 'money types' are buying up the cottages as weekend holiday homes. He

concludes the chat with "We don't talk to press." It's not unfriendly but it is definite.

CATCHING COLD

A long bleached boardwalk stretches from the roadside to shore, its clean structure striking against the shingle's disarray. Fishing rods stand to attention along the shore, lines bending into the sea – the area is a popular spot for winter cod-fishing. Solitary men in oilskins hunker down in tents to shelter from the wind, flasks of tea propped in the pebbles. Further on, a set of thin, disused train tracks run randomly across the shingle, going nowhere.

PLANT POWER

The nature reserve itself is of particular interest. Dungeness is home to 600 species of

plant – one third of all the plants in Britain. Not only that, but the warm water expelled by the power station fosters rich birdlife. Waterbirds are the main attraction in winter – look out for smews and Slavonian grebes diving on the gravel pits, along with bitterns and bearded tits on the nature trails.

Daylight retreats and the power station's lights glimmer in the gloaming across the gravel pits, while flocks of birds settle on the water. Dungeness is wild, odd and appealing and I shall be back – I feel I have only just scratched the surface. Hidden depths abound here. It's always the quiet ones...



Maria Hodson

Our production editor loves all things seaside and spontaneous

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02 CLIMB A VOLCANO

AONACH EAGACH, HIGHLANDS

It may look challenging, but this adrenalin-pumping scramble along the ridge of an ancient volcano is fabulous, says **Joe Pontin**



A string of eruptions shook the Western Highlands 420 million years ago: millions of tons of magma emptied from the belly of a supervolcano, leaving a huge void inside it.

Bit by bit, the volcano roof collapsed into this void. Eventually, only the massive ramparts to the north and south remained. Between them formed a huge valley, now famous for its rugged beauty. That's Glencoe.

So when you walk the glen's north ridge, you are standing on the edge of an enormous extinct volcano.

MIND OVER MATTER

This violent history is perfectly expressed in the most dramatic part of this ridge – **Aonach Eagach** – two miles of jagged dragon's-back between two high peaks, **Am Bodach** and **Sgorr nam Fiannaidh**.

Horribly narrow and exposed, it has a reputation as mainland Scotland's toughest scramble – a route to be traversed only with resort to hands.

Frankly, it's terrifying. But it's also exhilarating, thrilling and unforgettable.

Experienced mountaineers will tell you that the challenge is not technical but psychological. Put bluntly, being so close to certain death can mess with your head.

If your nerve fails, you're

stuck. There are no safe routes back down into Glencoe until you reach the official exit – so no bailing out.

Reassuringly, my companion for the day was an experienced scrambler. And conditions were perfect: sunny, warm and dry. In winter you'll need an ice axe and crampons.

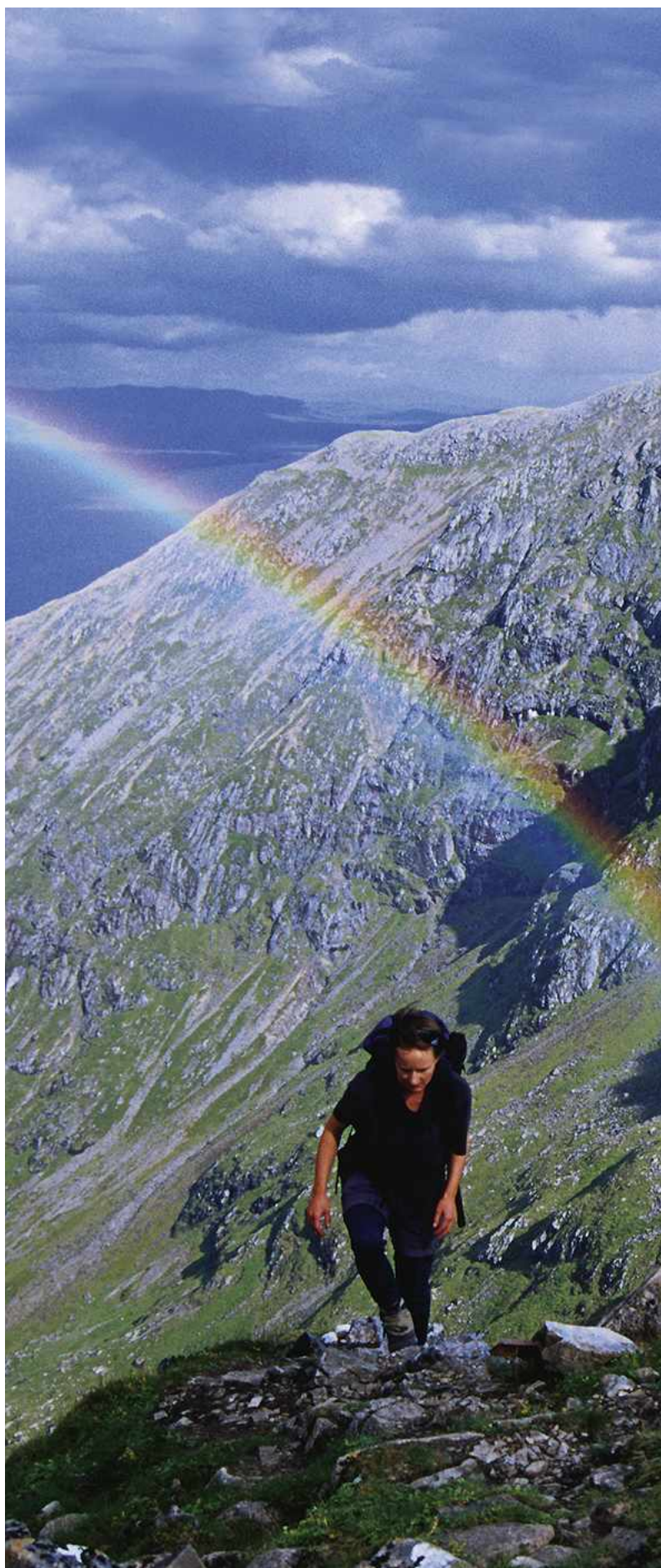
IN FOR THE THRILL

From the car park in Glencoe, the path leads up the side of the glen, zigzagging steeply up through 800m of densely packed contours to Am Bodach's 943m (3,904ft) peak. From there, the whole ridge is a thrill ride, but the toughest part is west of **Meall Dearg**. It's narrow in places, with (of course) sheer drops on either side. There are many short scrambles, where you'll need to use hands for stability – especially the Crazy Pinnacles. My best advice is to go at your own pace: don't rush it.

From Sgorr nam Fiannaidh, at the end of the Aonach Eagach ridge, I can remember almost nothing about the walk back, except the hilariously tame stroll along the bottom of Glencoe to the car, followed by a celebration pint at the **Clachaig Inn**. Mission accomplished. I survived.



Joe Pontin is BBC Countryfile Magazine's wandering features editor



A high-angle photograph of a rugged mountain range. The foreground shows a rocky, moss-covered ridge. The middle ground features steep, rocky slopes with patches of green vegetation. In the background, a deep valley is visible, with a rainbow arching across the lower left. The sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds.

***“Frankly, it’s terrifying.
But it’s also exhilarating,
thrilling and unforgettable”***

Care for your garden birds in winter

Studies by the BTO have found that birds are much more likely to visit your garden if there is a regular source of food available. They will supplement their diet with provided food year round, especially during the busy late spring breeding season, and, of course, over winter. So, how can you help the birds survive the next few months? Here are a few handy tips...

What to provide for the birds?

Species such as Goldfinch, which were once infrequent visitors to gardens, have responded to the increasing availability of foods like sunflower hearts, nyger seed and high energy seed blends. There is a great range of seed mixes now available, and, as with so many things, you get what you pay for.

◆ A good quality high energy **seed blend** will have a lower cereal content and be carefully balanced to attract a range of species. There are also specialists blends available to attract finches, Blue Tits, Dunnocks, Robins, Blackbirds and other popular garden birds.

◆ Live foods, especially **mealworms**, are a favourite of robins, starlings and blackbirds.

◆ **Peanuts** have been a staple garden bird food for years, but their use by birds has fallen as other foods have become available. Use peanuts that have been tested for aflatoxin (a naturally occurring toxin), and provide them in a wire mesh feeder and not loose and whole, as birds might choke.

◆ A definite winter favourite is suet, and **suet balls** that are high in protein and fats deliver an instant energy fix.

◆ Finally – don't forget **water**. To prevent your bird bath freezing over, add a small ball such as a ping pong ball to the water. It will move in the breeze, keeping even a small amount of water ice-free.

How to provide for the birds?

There is a range of feeders and bird tables available, and again, investing in quality is recommended. A range of foods, presented around the garden in different types of feeder, will attract more birds.

◆ **Hanging feeders**

These are ideal for feeding seed blends, peanuts, nyger seed, suet balls, sunflower hearts and seeds. The great advantage of hanging feeders is that you can easily position them in a safe location close to your home or a perfect garden spot, where you can enjoy watching birds as they feed.

◆ **Bird tables**

Bird tables are also highly recommended, as some species, such as Blackbirds, struggle to use hanging feeders. Bird tables keep food dry and offer a sheltered spot for birds to feed. These are great for all seed blends and suet based treats.

◆ **Hygiene tips**

Remove wet food and clean your hanging feeders, bird tables and feeding areas regularly to minimise the risk of disease being passed between visiting birds.

Do:

◆ Store your bird food in a clean, dry and cool environment inaccessible to pests.

◆ Provide clean water all year round, birds need it for bathing and drinking!



John Harding/BTO

◆ Double-up on feeding equipment, so that one set is air-drying after cleaning while the other is in use.

◆ Feed the birds year round and not just in winter. Spring feeding helps birds get into breeding condition, while inexperienced fledglings benefit from food in summer and autumn.

◆ BTO feeding advice is at www.bto.org/gbw

Don't:

◆ Don't leave out salted peanuts and bacon rind, desiccated coconut, or those which are mouldy or spoiled (for example meat scraps).

◆ Don't add salt or antifreeze to water left out for birds.

Happy feeding and birdwatching! Now, where are those binoculars...?



John Harding/BTO



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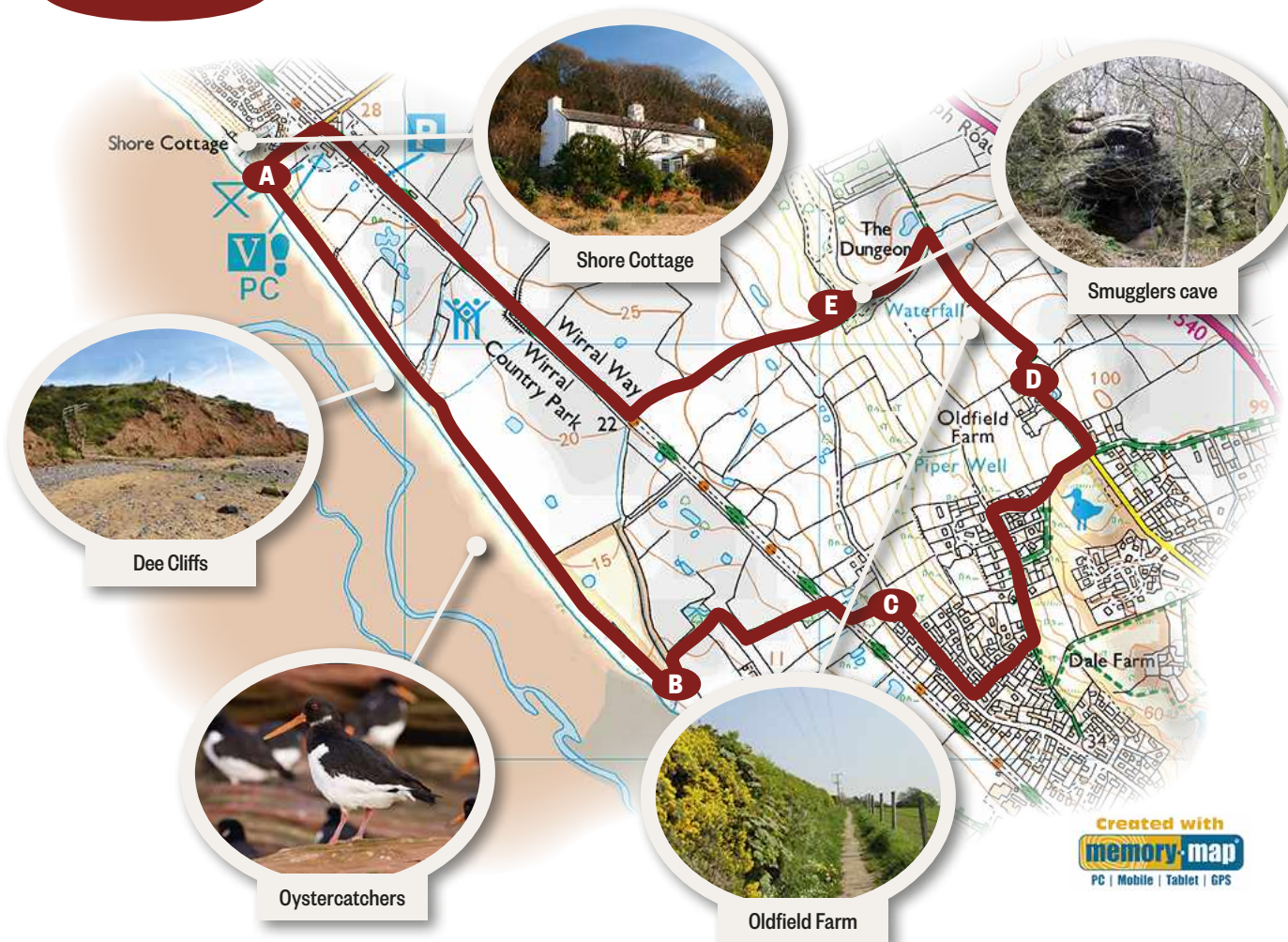
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03 SEE A SMUGGLERS' CAVE WIRRAL

Stalk the trails of rogue traders of old, along a wild, isolated coastline of caves, cliffs and secret paths, says **Deborah Mulhearn**

S mugglers' stories abound in Wirral. Follow their trail along the evocative west Wirral shoreline to find ideal hiding places for contraband.

Park at Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre car park. Check tides before setting off (call 0151 648 4371).

A SHORE COTTAGE

Take the steps to the beach at the end of Station Road. Turn left at Shore Cottage and walk to the cordgrass or 'spartina' saltmarsh. A range of waders such as oystercatchers can be spotted on the banks of the

River Dee. At the height of the 18th-century trade of rum, wine, silk and tea, such beaches were ideal for landing contraband, particularly during the long dark winter nights.

B DEE CLIFFS

A path leads off the beach at a stream. Cross Heswall Fields to the barred gate and go through a second gate. Cross open ground to a kissing gate. A straight path brings you to the Wirral Way. Turn right then left after 100m.

C MOONLIGHTING

The path rises here, emerging

onto Piper's Lane. You can imagine the smugglers carrying their casks up these paths to the secret tunnels of houses, farms and inns. The smugglers were mostly fishermen, but merchants and ships' captains were also involved.

D OLDFIELD FARM

Turn right then first left onto Redstone Drive. Turn left then continue, following Greenfield Lane round to the right. At the top turn left and follow the sign to Thurston. Cross the farmyard and continue left on the footpath just outside the

gate. Cross the stone stile, and continue to Dungeon Wood.

E DUNGEON WOOD

Head back down to the Wirral Way through the wood. Go down the steps and look up to your left to see the 'smugglers' cave'. This dramatic overhang, probably once hidden by foliage, was allegedly where the goods were stashed. Follow the Wirral Way back down to the car park.



Deborah Mulhearn is a freelance writer and literary walks guide in Liverpool



4 > 9 WONDER-FALLS

See, hear, touch – even walk behind – some of the most dramatic watery spectacles our countryside has to offer, says **Roly Smith**



4. HARDRAW FORCE WENSLEYDALE, YORKSHIRE DALES

Not usually given to hyperbole, Alfred Wainwright considered the elegant, slender 30m (100ft) waterfall of Hardraw Force, near Hawes in the Yorkshire Dales, as “the most impressive natural feature in the north”. Reached via the Green Dragon Inn (entrance fee), it is the highest single drop waterfall in England, and a simple scramble takes you behind the shifting column of spray, memorably captured in 1816 by that artist of light, JMW Turner.



5. HIGH FORCE & CAULDRON SNOUT TEESDALE, COUNTY DURHAM

High Force (above), where the mighty Tees crashes over a 22m (72ft) outcrop of Whin Sill near Middleton-in-Teesdale, may not be the highest waterfall in England,

but it's certainly the most impressive. Enclosed within a wooded amphitheatre of clerical-grey doleritic rocks, it's one of the most dramatic highlights along the Pennine

Way (the brilliant idea of journalist and Rambler Tom Stephenson), matched only by the foaming, 182m (600ft) cascade of Cauldron Snout six miles further on.



6. CAUTLEY SPOUT HOWGILL FELS, CUMBRIA

Cautley Spout, at 198m (650ft) is also often claimed to be the longest above-ground waterfall in England. More accurately, it is a series of pretty cascades formed as Cautley Home Beck tumbles down a rowan-festooned ravine

from the reigning Howgill peak of The Calf. The two-mile walk up the Rawthey valley from The Cross Keys (a 17th-century National Trust Temperance Inn on the A683 Sedburgh-Kirkby Stephen road) provides a superb introduction.



7. GREY MARE'S TAIL DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

At about 60m (200ft) tall, the evocatively named Grey Mare's Tail waterfall, near Moffat in Dumfries and Galloway, is a superb example of a 'hanging' valley, left behind by Ice Age glaciers. The Tail Burn flows out of Loch Skeen to cascade impressively through a steep cleft into the valley of Moffat Water below. The fall is reached by a steep path from the NTS car park off the A708 Moffat-Selkirk road.

Photo: Getty, Alamy



8. PISTYLL RHAADR BERWYN MOUNTAINS, MID-WALES

In his classic 1862 travelogue *Wild Wales*, George Borrow memorably described Pistyll Rhoadr, near the village of Llanrhaeadr-ym-Mochnant in the Berwyns just inside Wales: "I never saw water falling so gracefully, so much like thin, beautiful threads." Borrow's "skein of silk" is the highest single-drop waterfall in Britain, where the Afon Disgynfa falls 73m (240ft) in three graceful leaps, over a cliff of 450-year-old Silurian rocks into a wooded dell.



9. SGWD-YR-EIRA BRECON BEACONS

The Welsh name of Sgwd-yr-Eira means 'the fall of snow', and it is an outstanding feature of the Brecon Beacons' famed Waterfall Country, in the pearly grey limestone belt around the village of Ystradfellte. The Afon Hepste plummets over an undercut 15m (50ft) sandstone shelf, creating another waterfall you can see from the inside by using an old shepherds' path tucked away behind the thundering curtain of snow-white water.



10 STEP BACK IN TIME FORMBY, MERSEYSIDE

Follow in the footsteps of our Mesolithic forebears in a stunning sandy landscape of dunes and pines, natterjack toads and red squirrels, says **Mark Rowe**



Formby and the adjacent Sefton Coast, north of Liverpool, is simply spectacular, a magical expanse of beach, sand dunes and pines improbably surviving on the edge of a large metropolis. The sand dunes are the fourth largest in the British Isles, and are

part of a wider Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation. And they have a secret only revealed after high tide – and then only to a lucky few.

When the waves pull back, they can reveal a Mesolithic landscape, footprints of men and children, roe and red deer,

which have been identified as 5,000 years old. You may also spot the prints of aurochs, a long extinct species of cattle, and more delicate prints from oystercatchers and cranes.

These casts from a previous landscape are not fossils; they are imprints on clay preserved when they were filled by fine

silt. The footprints were left by hunters and prey at a time when the area was a saltmarsh, ripe with hunting opportunities for our distant ancestors. They capture a second-long snapshot of the lives lived by our forebears. Some show humans running – but in pursuit of, or away from, what?

The sea grazes at the sand dunes at Formby Point, one of the fastest eroding coastlines in the UK



ABOVE Pinewoods pepper the walk to the coast **BELOW** Ancient footprints in silt layers at Formby



RUSSET REVIVAL

The Red Squirrel Walk loops the woodlands for 750m. These squirrels are at the forefront of the battle against their overbearing grey cousins: a few years ago, their numbers were devastated by the squirrel pox virus but recent studies found that 10% of the Formby reds carry pox antibodies. Once as shaky as Formby's dunes, their future looks a little brighter.

The spectacle of the imprints is all the more breathtaking because they reveal themselves in a landscape of immense change. Formby Point – now

“With a high tide and high wind, 5m to 10m of dune can be lost in one go”

more flattened than pointy – is receding by as much as four metres a year, making this one of the fastest eroding coastlines

in the UK. With a high tide and high wind, 5m to 10m of dune can be lost in one go. Stand on top of the dunes at high tide and you all but see the sea eating away at the landscape.

If your luck is in, you'll identify the prints in outcrops of silt that appear from time to time on the foreshore, some 100 metres west of the dune edge. Reaching this spot involves a lovely walk

through the dunes. The easiest way is to follow the waymarked Sefton Coastal Path. This weaves through a mixture of pinewoods, larch and deciduous woodland. A fifth of Britain's natterjack toads – distinguished by a yellow stripe on their back – are found at Sefton. Barn owls and tawny owls thrive on the voles and mice among the well-drained, sandy soil.

As the path crosses Dale Slack Gutter, it climbs over an old golf course tee, one of the

highest points hereabouts. From here, you can see Snowdonia, Anglesey, and, on a clear day's winter day, Conistown Old Man and Black Combe in the Lake District. Apart from the offshore wind turbines and Blackpool tower, it's a view the owners of those



Mark Rowe is a journalist specialising in environmental issues, travel and wildlife.

11 SAIL A TALLSHIP IRISH SEA

Pulling ropes, climbing masts and even taking the wheel – this rousing adventure across the rolling seas is well worth the effort, says **Heather McKay**



It's always been a dream of mine to just join the crew of a tall ship and sail away.

A dream I thought it would be pretty unlikely to realise, until I came across the Tall Ships Youth Trust's website (www.tallships.org), where I found a voyage that anyone (ages 18-80) could join, even a landlubber like me with no sailing experience. Perfect.

Several weeks later I was heading towards the *Stavros S Niarchos*, docked in Dublin harbour. Clambering aboard, trainees were quickly shown

our cosy bunks, and it was time to get to work. With nervous smiles and growing confidence, three separate groups, or 'watches', were trained up over the next day.

The sails are set entirely using manual labour, so concentration and teamwork are essential. There's a whopping nine miles of rigging on deck, controlling the five yards attached to the two masts, and five staysails. It's a logical system, and once you get the hang of what happens where, you can really go for it.

There's so much to take on that this nautical bubble rapidly becomes your whole world. Learning the glossary in your welcome pack beforehand really helps.

Four-hour watches include helming the ship, which only requires a sensitive touch, and looking out for (and understanding) various lights if on a night-shift lookout. Then there's the climbing. It's more mentally challenging than physically (a safety harness is provided) but be prepared to be sent up to at least the upper

topsail (the third sail up in the picture). Once there, a serenity overcomes you as you look out across the ocean. And, once you're back down, the adrenalin rush of completing your task is like nothing else.

Apart from the glorious realisation that it's time for a delicious three-course lunch in the mess room...



Heather McKay has possibly watched *Pirates of the Caribbean* one too many times...



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12 ENTER THE BRONZE AGE

DODDINGTON MOOR, NORTHUMBERLAND

Discover the dwelling places and mysterious rock artwork of some of the earliest inhabitants of Britain, with **Anthony Toole** Map: Stuart Jackson-Garter

Early morning mists drifting across the lower reaches of Doddington Moor impart an appropriate air of mystery.

Though the summit just clears the 200-metre contour, it feels higher, for there's little else nearby. The western slopes drop steeply to the broad valley of the River Till, which meanders north to join the Tweed at the border.

The view, out of all proportion to the altitude, takes in Northumberland's highest hills – the **Cheviot** and **Hedgehope**, **Yeavinger Bell** – and the medieval battle sites of **Homildon** and **Flodden**.

But the history of Doddington Moor stretches much farther back than the medieval, into a past hidden in the realms of speculation. Follow a gentle ascent through Wooler golf course, and you will find yourself exploring footpaths through a wild upland of bracken and heather, dotted with Bronze and Iron Age hillforts and settlements dating back to the second millennium BC. And scattered among these are relics of a stone circle and rocks covered with mysterious symbols carved by Neolithic artists from perhaps 2,000 years earlier.

Northumberland is rich in relics, with more than 1,000 rock art sites. This gentle two-hour hill walk is a great way to sample the finest of these.



Anthony Toole
is a writer whose interests include rural rambles.



EASTERN ROCKS

Occupying the centre of a field, these slabs – though more weathered than the Dod Law stones – display deep cup hollows, some enclosed by concentric rings.



THE RINGSES

Bracken-covered, this hillfort is more prominent than that on Dod Law. Though Iron Age in origin, some of the enclosed structures date from Roman times. Animals were probably held in the space inside the southern gateway.





STONE CIRCLE

Little of this remains except a 1.7m-high, severely weathered and lichen-covered standing stone, along with its two weathered fallen companions.



DOD LAW SUMMIT

Uneven ground around the summit trig point indicates an ancient settlement, though it is difficult to tell which humps might be artificial and which natural.



DOD LAW ROCKS

Flush with the ground and surrounded by bracken, these two large rock slabs are inlaid with cup-shaped depressions enclosed by circles, ovoids, squares and trapezia.



DOD LAW HILLFORT

Holding a commanding position on the moor's western edge, up close the bracken-covered walls remain clearly delineated. Partial excavations during the 1980s uncovered pottery, glass and bone.

13 & 14 VISIT A VANISHING COAST

ORFORD NESS SUFFOLK

Explore a sublimely empty stretch of shingle abandoned by the military and reclaimed by nature and the North Sea, says **Oliver Bennett**

Suffolk is normally thought of as a homely kind of place.

Well yes; but at the same time, it's on England's raw edge, where the swirling North Sea claims the land, and where expanses of shingle gaze into the void.

There are few better places to find this sublime Anglia than in Orford Ness – 'Nes' an old Norse word meaning headland. Pass the lovely village of Orford, with its ochre houses and food emporia, and take a ferry to this shingle spit.

When you land, you'll feel the difference. This is the largest such spit in Europe,

inhabited by hares, waders and wildfowl, and with its own special empty beauty. The 10-mile spit also offers strangeness in the shape of disused military buildings. For over 70 years this was MoD land, shrouded in secrecy.

Walk on under huge skies, where you'll spot a red-and-white lighthouse like a giant barber's pole. It's a special place, not comforting, but with an otherworldly charm.



Oliver Bennett

is a journalist and editor, writing on travel, art and architecture.



SPURN HEAD EAST YORKSHIRE

Andrew White wanders a remote wilderness delicately balanced on a slim spit of land – a place of great yet fragile beauty



There is simply no place like it in the British Isles. Spurn is a stunning piece of land fighting against the elements to protect its wild inhabitants – the slender bent finger of land pointing out from the coast of Holderness in East Yorkshire, across the north mouth of Humber.

It was formed from sediment, gravel and sand washing down the coast and deposited where the Humber and the North Sea meet.

It probably holds the record for the most designations per square mile: it's a National

Nature Reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Area of Conservation – just to mention three – and it's only over 1 ¼ square miles.

Spurn is open at all times, but after a major tidal surge in December 2013 a large part of the road was washed away, so access is now only on foot. Far from being a problem, this is actually the perfect way to experience this unique landscape.



Andrew White

is a writer, filmmaker and broadcaster who loves exploring the outdoors.



LUNDY



Take a magical winter holiday to Lundy

Whether you're escaping with loved ones or wanting to enjoy an intimate family break away from the hustle and bustle of a busy home life, make sure that the people close to you have a magical time on Lundy.

Fly by Helicopter from Hartland point near Bideford on Mondays and Fridays, an exhilarating six minute flight and experience one of Lundy's twenty three individual beautiful properties from a thirteenth century Castle to a lighthouse, fisherman's chalet and a school house. Explore the wild winter wildlife or take a bracing walk to see the stunning coastal landscapes, then warm your feet by the crackling open fire and sip traditional mulled wine in the Marisco Tavern.

The Tavern is the hub of Island life, a wonderfully atmospheric place that conveys the rich interest of the island, with a good selection of wines and beers. When available, island produce such as Lundy Lamb and Venison are on the menu also visitors will find an imaginative choice of vegetarian dishes.

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HARE APPARENT

A magnificent photo diary delving deep into the hidden world of these captivating mammals

MY YEAR WITH HARES

MARTIN HAYWARD SMITH
RED HARE PUBLISHING, £27.95
ISBN 978 0993029301

Martin Hayward Smith arrived in Norfolk to make a wildlife film about brown hares. But things didn't go as planned. The animals got under his skin and he started taking photographs, spending days

crammed in a tiny hide fighting boredom and migraines to capture a single worthwhile shot (and then, not always a hare). Things went further until he couldn't leave the county until he'd spent a year with his famously ethereal quarry.

The result is a book capturing beautiful, accomplished and sometimes unique images of hare behavior set against a backdrop of

wide Norfolk acres. Predators and wildlife neighbours also feature – sometimes in the same dramatic picture – and the story culminates with Martin's raising of a leveret in his home. Harlene, rescued from a dog attack, is eventually released into the wild but not before entrancing the author.

Fergus Collins, editor



A timeless view from Iona to Mull – look out for sea eagles

BOOK IONA: THE OTHER ISLAND

BY KENNETH STEVEN AND IAIN SARJEANT
SAINT ANDREW PRESS £14.99
ISBN 9780861538300



Nestled next to the Isle of Mull in the Inner Hebrides, two ferry journeys from mainland Scotland, Iona is an

otherworldly place by nature. Known as Ì Chaluim Chille in Gaelic, the tiny islet is just 1.5 miles wide but boasts a ruggedly beautiful coastline hugged by aquamarine water, while an iconic abbey watches over the land that was once known as the 'cradle of Christianity' throughout Scotland.

Writer and poet Kenneth Steven and photographer Iain Sarjeant are lifelong

lovers of the island, and the book collects their favourite places, folk tales and memories of Iona, exploring the island's coves, beaches and special places. Each page reveals a new gem dear to their hearts, often with intriguing names: the Port of the Marten-Cat Cliff, the Young Lad's Rock, the Gully of Pat's Cow.

Only 150 people live on Iona but visitors remain captivated by it for the rest of their lives, and Steven's simply written poems coupled with Sarjeant's photographs of sweeping vistas and macro details capture this feeling beautifully. Sure to make you want to hightail it to the Hebrides, *Iona: The Other Island* makes a wonderful alternative guidebook for a tramp around the island.

Sian Lewis, web editor

RADIO BBC FOOD & FARMING AWARDS

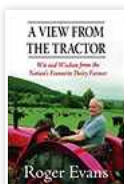
THE FOOD PROGRAMME, RADIO 4
11 JANUARY

On *The Food Programme* on 11 January, chef and presenter of BBC 2's *The Incredible Spice Men* Cyrus Todiwala will open nominations for this year's BBC Food & Farming Awards. He's chairing a team of judges that includes Diana Henry, Hattie Ellis, Tim Hayward and Adam Henson (below). Together they'll be working to identify Britain's best food and drink producers, local food retailers and food markets. Listeners can nominate in any of the categories from their favourite food shop through to an outstanding food producer or school dinner cook. Farmers and food businesses can also nominate themselves, or encourage customers to send in a nomination, from 11 January through www.bbc.co.uk/foodawards. Nominations close midnight, 25 January. The winners will be revealed at an awards ceremony held in Bristol in May, with coverage following shortly after on BBC Radio 4 and on BBC1's *Countryfile*.



BOOK A VIEW FROM THE TRACTOR

BY ROGER EVANS
MERLIN UNWIN BOOKS, £8.40
ISBN 9781906122683



If your image of the typical British farmer is the straw-chewing, shotgun-wielding "get off my land" type, then Roger Evans will dispel that impression

within a paragraph or two. He's a Shropshire dairy and poultry farmer

who has been writing witty and thought-provoking newspaper columns about life on the land for several years. This latest collection of diary entries covers everything from sheep sales and beer festivals to farmland wildlife and the joy of keeping pigs. Night-time excursions to the village pub and a suspicion of 'newcomers' seem to be something of a theme.

Evans has a charming, almost childlike habit of naming many of the animals that he rears. There's Eric the turkey, Neville the cockerel and Peter the British Blue bull, while his chickens' greatest enemy is

referred to as 'Mr' Fox. The author is a self-confessed softie and the book is littered with references to his family and in particular the adventures and attitudes of his young grandchildren.

This book won't give you a working knowledge of agricultural methods or answer some of the burning questions about the future of farming. It's not meant to. Instead it will raise a wry smile and make you think a little more kindly about farming folk next time you get struck behind a slow-moving tractor.

Vernon Harwood, BBC radio presenter



Farmhouse kitchen

A FAVOURITE SEASONAL RECIPE TO ENJOY THIS MONTH

CHICKEN WITH LENTILS AND ROSEMARY

An easy one-pot supper for a cold night, this is started off on the hob and then transferred to the oven to bake. A sturdy casserole, or any good pan that's both flameproof and ovenproof, is the ideal vessel.

SERVES 4

- > 2 tablespoons rapeseed or olive oil
- > 1 large onion, sliced
- > 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- > Leaves from 2 sprigs of rosemary
- > 200g red lentils, well rinsed
- > 500ml chicken or veg stock
- > 8 skin-on, bone-in, free range chicken thighs, or 1 medium chicken (about 1.75kg), jointed into 6–8 pieces
- > Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- > Flat-leaf parsley, chopped, to finish

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas 4. Choose a flameproof casserole dish or a wide, ovenproof pan that will hold all the chicken pieces snugly but comfortably.

2 Put the casserole on a medium-low heat. Add the oil and then the onion and cook, stirring regularly, for six to eight minutes until it begins to soften. Add the garlic, rosemary and some salt and pepper. Cook gently for a further five minutes, then stir in the lentils and stock.

3 Season the chicken thighs and place skin-side up in the casserole. You want most of the chicken skin to remain exposed above the liquid in the dish so it can brown in the oven. Bring to a simmer on the hob, then transfer to the oven and bake, uncovered, for one hour. Check that the chicken is cooked right through and the lentils are soft. If not, return to the oven for 10–15 minutes and test again. Skim off any excess fat from the surface.

4 Taste the lentilly liquor and add more salt or pepper if needed. Serve, scattered with chopped parsley, just as it is or with steamed broccoli or spring greens on the side.



make



Recipe from
**River Cottage
Light & Easy** by
Hugh Fearnley-
Whittingstall
(Bloomsbury, £25)

VARIATION RABBIT CASSEROLE

Wild rabbit is a delicious lean meat, and a young specimen, skinned and jointed (just ask your butcher) works very well in this recipe in place of the chicken. A couple of rashers of streaky bacon, cut into thick matchsticks, can be sweated with the onions and will help to keep the rabbit tender.



Go online for more seasonal treats

For foraging guides, recipes, homemade bread and other delights: www.countryfile.com/countryside/seasonal-food

Country puzzles

RACK YOUR RURAL BRAIN WITH THESE WILD AND WONDERFUL GAMES

COUNTRYSIDE QUIZ by Maria Hodson

answers opposite page, below



1) When was the Forestry Commission established?

- ☐ a) 1899
- ☐ b) 1919
- ☐ c) 1949
- ☐ d) 1989

2) Where is Macbeth, King of Scotland from 1040-1057, buried?

- ☐ a) Iona Abbey
- ☐ b) Dunfermline Abbey
- ☐ c) Stratford-upon-Avon
- ☐ d) Dunsinane Hill

3) What is the name of our native swan species?

- ☐ a) Trumpeter
- ☐ b) Mute
- ☐ c) Whooper
- ☐ d) Odette



4) According to Norse legend, Baldur, the god of truth and light, was killed by a spear made of what?

- ☐ a) Mistletoe
- ☐ b) Maple
- ☐ c) Mountain birch
- ☐ d) Mango

5) Where would you find the Devil's Pulpit?

- ☐ a) Cairngorms
- ☐ b) Peak District
- ☐ c) Wye Valley
- ☐ d) Soho

6) What is the Seven Sisters star cluster also known as?

- ☐ a) Praesepe
- ☐ b) Hyades
- ☐ c) Plesiosaurs
- ☐ d) Pleiades

7) Dartmoor has its own sport, a cross between orienteering and treasure hunting.

What is it called?

- ☐ a) Rubber stamping

- ☐ b) Letter boxing
- ☐ c) Pub crawling
- ☐ d) Box trekking

8) Which breed of sheep are native to the Lake District and are capable of surviving in cold temperatures at high altitude?

- ☐ a) Hardcore
- ☐ b) Hebridean
- ☐ c) Hill Radnor
- ☐ d) Herdwick



9) At which occasion were the first fireworks recorded in England?

- ☐ a) At the wedding of Henry VII in 1486
- ☐ b) At the coronation of James VI and I in 1603

- ☐ c) At the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace in 1851
- ☐ d) At the 1969 moon landing

10) What is a stoat's primary food source?

- ☐ a) Tourists
- ☐ b) Eggs
- ☐ c) Mice
- ☐ d) Rabbits

11) The New River in Hertfordshire was built between 1604-1613 - why?

- ☐ a) To prevent the River Lea flooding
- ☐ b) To supply London with drinking water
- ☐ c) To carry goods from the maltings industry to market
- ☐ d) To replace the Old River, which had become difficult and set in its ways

WHERE IN BRITAIN? by Jonty Clark

Can you identify this well-known place?

Jonty®



answer opposite page, below

COUNTRYSIDE CROSSWORD

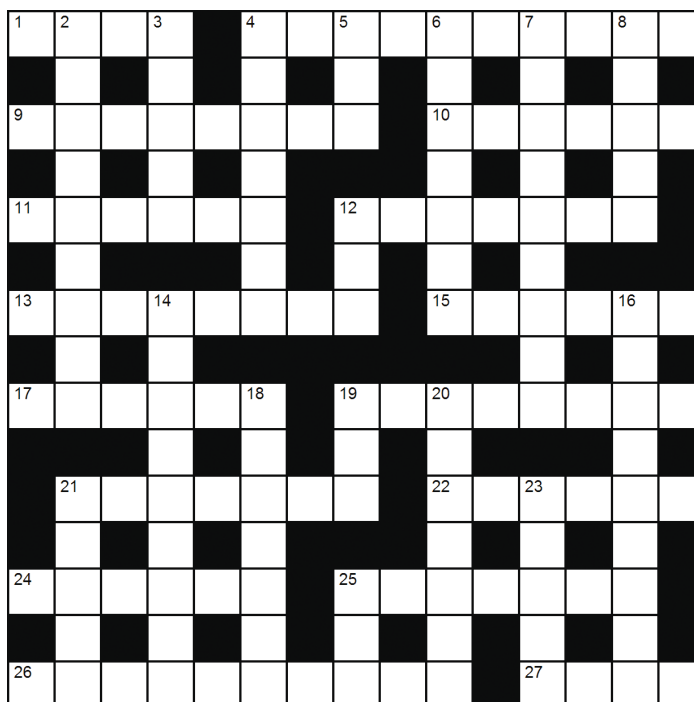
by Eddie James

ACROSS

- 1** Mark a craggy outcrop (4)
4 Site of a giant carvery in Dorset! (5,5)
9 Spineless, thistle-like flower – keep Dawn out! (8)
10 Raised/moved water – wearing plimsolls? (6)
11/19 Genius cast away broken basalt rocks off Antrim's coast (6,8)
12 Sings like a chiffchaff? (7)
13 Summer visitor of thrush family – sort of starred, end of foot (8)
15 Lancs/N Yorks river – not quite a trickle (6)
17 Stay in Grasmere mainly (6)
19 See 11 across
21 Hi-tech fabric that contains tears! (3-4)
22 Herb with celery-like taste makes veal go off (6)
24 See 5 down
25 Pack horse's basket – possibly nine in Par (7)
26 eg Weald meadows – marijuana comes down to earth! (10)
27 Agent goes round eastern river of NE Scotland (4)

DOWN

- 2** Many-legged arthropod – possibly ten-pieced (9)
3 Yorkshire market town in trip, once (5)



- 4** Borough on Thames Path National Trail followed by pensioner? (7)
5/24 Ruddy arachnid, a mite annoying in the greenhouse! (3,6)
6 Ruler applied to a large moth? (7)
7 Stinger that could give you a buzz? (9)
8 Acres cultivated to produce eg maples (5)
12 In brief, Peter Scott's conservation charity (3)
14 Panic-stricken rushes of cattle made pests dizzy! (9)
16 Wales' largest natural lake left angler so confused (9)

- 18** Organic – an ultra transformation (7)
19 Edible mushroom in lettuce patch (3)
20 Confusing description of the Downs? (7)
21 More mature (5)
23 Twisted vines leaf features (5)
25 Female swan nestling in Chippenham (3)

CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

CHRISTMAS

ACROSS: 1 Chestnut
 6/9 Norway spruce
 10 Mute swan 13 Larva
 14 Busy 15 Lights 17
 Skerries 19 Hornsea
 21 Scythe 22 Acme
 24 DEFRA 26 Pare
 27 Festival 28 Ullock
 30 Herded 31 Yuletide

DOWN: 2 Hip 3 Scull
 4 Needles 5 Tamar 6 Nut
 case 7 Raspberry 8
 Amass 12/17 Irish Sea
 16 Harvested 18 Esher
 20 St David 21 Seagull
 23 Crewe 25 Filly
 26/11 Pilot Hill 29 Cud

DECEMBER

ACROSS: 1 GM crop
 5 Incubate 9 Anemones
 10 Rother 11 Crop circle
 13 Ha-ha 14 Gathers
 15 Turnip 17 Dashed
 19 Bellows 21 Spit 23
 Corgi 24 Sash 26
 Galway 27 Hardwood
 29 Strides 30 Mayfly

DOWN: 2 Manor 3 Ram
 4/28 Pennine Way
 5 Insects 6 Corbett
 7 Bitch 8 The Chains
 12 Pitch 14 Grampians
 16 Roots 18 Decayed
 19 Birches 20 Leitrim
 22 Tower 25 Shoal

 **Online quiz**
 Visit our website
 for more puzzles **www.countryfile.com/quiz**

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Jul-Dec 2013
 39,219

HELP BIRDS AND HABITAT

As we all resolve to cut back after the excesses of Christmas, one of your New Year's resolutions might be to do a little bit more for your local wildlife

With natural habitats rapidly disappearing, your local garden birds need your support during the coldest months of the year. To help them you can provide high energy seed mixes and suet products like those available from Birds and Bees Ltd.

Make Britain a Better Place for Wildlife

You'll be helping more than just the birds in your garden because Birds & Bees are on a mission to Make Britain a Better Place for Wildlife. That's why they have

YOU'LL BE HELPING MORE THAN JUST THE BIRDS IN YOUR GARDEN

committed to planting 1 Sq.ft of wild flower meadow for every new customer who joins them. They only buy the cereals and grains used in their wild bird food range from UK bird and bee friendly farmers. The majority of the crops

are grown on the farm that initially inspired the brand.

Living Bird Tables

Birds & Bees is the result of a 10 year project which has seen the farm in the Cotswolds, transformed into a haven for wildlife, creating over 150 acres of new wildlife habitat. As well as planting 1 Sq.ft of wild flower meadow for every new customer, the farm has miles of wild flower margins which connect up around the fields creating valuable wildlife corridors for a number of species including birds, bees, butterflies, insects, bats and other mammals.

The farm has many pioneering initiatives such as planting strips of wildflower meadows – they like to call them Living Bird Tables – a special mix of plants that are left to grow so that they continue to provide natural food for wild birds throughout the colder months. The Skylark landing strips help the ground nesting Skylarks avoid predators and get to their nest sites more easily. The increase in diversity and

abundance of wildlife at the farm is testament to the success of this farming philosophy.

The farm is situated on Upton House Estate, owned by the National Trust. You can visit the farm on one of its Open days throughout the year. More details can be found at www.birdsandbees.co.uk

LIVING BIRD TABLE

TEMPLE RISE – A WILD FLOWER MEADOW ON THE UPTON HOUSE ESTATE

BEEHIVES – THE FIRST 4 BEEHIVES IN A WILDFLOWER MEADOW ON THE FARM

BUMBLE BIRD MIX – WILD FLOWERS AND WILD BIRD FOOD PLANTS WHICH ARE LEFT TO GO TO SEED SO THAT THEY PROVIDE FOOD FOR BIRDS

To help you get started with supporting your local birds during the colder months of the year, Birds & Bees have put together a Special Offer for a limited period only and as a new customer, your 1 Sq. ft of wild flower meadow will be allocated to be planted in your honour at the next sowing opportunity.

SPECIAL OFFER

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Contains: 2.5Kg of Winter Booster Seed Mix, a 4-port plastic feeder and a Fruit n' Berry Suet Cake with holder.

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To order call **FREEPHONE 0800 440 2828** and quote the promo code **COUNTRY2** or visit the website www.birdsandbees.co.uk/ winterkit and enter the code **COUNTRY2** at the checkout.



Your countryside

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Tweet us [@CountryfileMag](https://twitter.com/CountryfileMag) or via Facebook www.facebook.com/countryfilemagazine

*We reserve the right to edit correspondence.

BEWARE OF 'BEE BEETLES'

As a beekeeper, I am worried about a far greater problem than pesticides: the small hive beetle. This insect has made it to the European mainland, southwest Italy, and is spreading fast. The Food and Environmental Research Agency (FERA) and British Bee Keepers Association (BBKA) believe it is most likely to come to the UK in fruit or root vegetables but a lot of beekeepers believe that it will arrive in packaged bees sent through the post. We would like a complete import ban on bees and bee products into the UK.

Melvyn Essen, chairman of Central Sussex Beekeepers

Entomologist Richard Jones responds:

Aethina tumida is a serious potential hive pest in the UK, but we still know little about how it has spread from its African homeland. If fruit were the most important vehicle, it would almost certainly have already been spread further, wider, sooner. Movement of bee products seems intuitively more likely, and raw beeswax imports were blamed for the beetle's recent arrival in Canada from the USA, but how it first got to Florida in 1998 is unknown. Global trade in anything has inherent risks of spreading pests and diseases. Vigilance is our only defence.

LOSS OF SCHOOL FARMS

Our local secondary school has just announced the closure of a

letter
of the
month

SAY NO TO BUSH-TUCKER TRIALS

Chris Packham's open letter to Ant & Dec, the presenters of ITV's *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!*, asking them to end animal cruelty in the 'bush-tucker trials' must be supported.

It beggars belief that the spectacle of someone squirming in a pit of rats or cockroaches, or eating a kangaroo's testicle, is something people wish to watch time and again. Would the British public find it acceptable if a similar show was set in, say, Northumberland, where celebrities are sent on 'Farne Isles Trials' in which they must eat raw puffin eggs while Arctic terns dive-bomb their heads?

But somehow, perhaps by playing on the risible stereotype that the rest of the



world has bestowed upon Australia, we have been hoodwinked into thinking that it is acceptable to film and broadcast the systematic humiliation of out-of-favour, media-hungry and narcissistic cretins, at the expense of animals.

**Peter JB Green,
Saffron Walden, Essex**

THE PRIZE

Our winner receives a selection of winter goodies from Extremities, worth £73. Action Sticky Windy Touch Screen Gloves £35, Merino Neck Tube £18, and Pyrenees Beanie £20. Alternative products of a similar value may be supplied.



very popular and successful school farm without consulting parents, pupils or even staff. We may seem biased, being farmers ourselves, but many other parents were shocked and disappointed. The

farm did not just serve to educate towards an examination, but there was a regularly over-subscribed farm club for all students to enjoy. We live in a rural area, but it never fails to surprise me that even in our area, the majority of people are quite ignorant about farming. Thanks to programmes like *Countryfile*, more people can learn about the countryside, but there is nothing like hands-on experience.

**Joanna and Andrew Kettlewell
Leyburn, North Yorkshire**



A healthy greenfinch, but look out for trichomonosis

GREENFINCH WOE

I've become aware of a virus among greenfinches that visit my garden. They bred well and, to our joy, youngsters came to feed on the sunflower hearts. We watched these seemingly healthy 'babies' become unable to feed and die. Online I found the disease is trichomonosis, which particularly affects the finch family. Short of ceasing to feed the birds in general, we could think of no way of helping them. We have visits from sparrowhawks that I initially found uncomfortable: I now feel it's a more swift and merciful end for sick birds than starvation.

Jenny Smith
Cambridgeshire

BBC Wildlife magazine's Ben Hoare responds:

There are two ways you can help fight finch trichomonosis: report suspected cases to the nationwide Garden Wildlife Health survey (www.gardenwildlifehealth.org) so that scientists can get a clearer picture of its spread, and be scrupulous about cleaning your bird feeders regularly to minimise the risk of parasite transmission.

STING IN THE TALE

Naturalist Richard Jones stated dead wasps could not sting (Month in the Country, November). I disagree with this, having been stung by a dead wasp. I

picked up what I thought was a dead leaf on the carpet but it was a dead wasp, and as it disintegrated, the sting went into my thumb, resulting in a painful swollen thumb for at least two weeks. I have also heard of other people being stung by dead wasps.

Mrs E Bourner, via email

Richard Jones responds:

Oh dear! Certainly neither the sawing mechanism of the sting, nor the squeezing mechanism of the venom sac, is under muscular control if the wasp is dead. Your incident may have arisen from the stiff sting piercing the skin and venom being squeezed from the reservoir bag by the pressure of your finger and thumb. This must be rare – however care should be exercised when picking up any 'dead' bee or wasp in case it is exhausted but alive enough for a last-minute reflex.

TOO LENIENT?

Countryfile on 23 November featured raptor persecution. A sentence of 10 weeks, suspended, for poisoning birds is laughable. The gamekeeper should have received at least six months – along with his employer, because no gamekeeper does this on his own initiative.

Joe Barry

Correction: in our Christmas issue, the illustrator on page 37 should have been credited as John Holder.



Social media

What you've been saying on Facebook and Twitter

We asked: Should St Ives council be allowed to ban second homes to improve affordable housing?

Colin W: St Ives council has no power to do anything but advise the LPA [Local Planning Authority].

Skingers: Who says the two are related? I agree we need more social housing.

Michael Johnson: Of course they should.

Chris Baxter: Manipulation of this marketplace will end in tears.

Denise Woodward: Yes. No one NEEDS more than one home.

Charlotte: Maybe limit the amount of second homes allowed in the area?

We asked readers to vote for the UK's best city for country lovers

Lin Harrison: Sheffield is my adopted home and I love it dearly. Walking our dog in its many parks is one of my joys!

Countryfile.com Rebecca Hodson: Birmingham – more miles of canals than Venice, they say! A far greener city than people think.

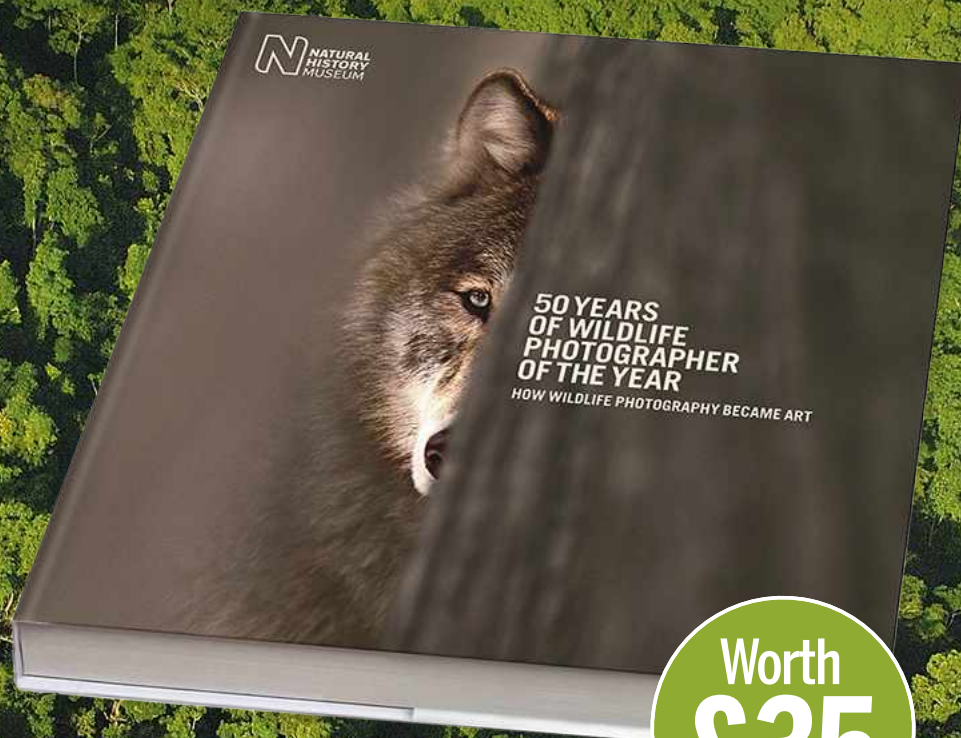
Countryfile.com Cynthia Booker: Cardiff has easy access to the wonderful Gower and the Brecon Beacons.

Countryfile.com Alan: Edinburgh... it's a city with the countryside within its boundaries. Dozens of parks and waterways.



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Brrr..illiant stuff

It may be cold outside, but with the right gear, you can keep cosy on your outdoor adventures this month. By **Julie Brominicks** and **Matt Swaine**

Kit editor **Joe Pontin** Photography **Steve Sayers**



1



2&3



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8

1. Delta Jacket, Arc'Teryx, £85. This mid-layer fleece is light and stowable while its waffle texture traps warm air. JB. For stockists call 015396 24040 or see 0207 078 3546, www.arcteryx.com **2. Durand WP mid boot**, Keen, £140. Lightweight, with bags of cushioning, these are ideal for long treks, and while they won't cope with the very worst of winter weather, they are snug and offer stability and support. MS. 00800 2255 5336, www.keenfootwear.com **3. Walker ice grips**, YakTrax, £12.95. These rubber and wire treads slip on to your boots and provide extra grip on ice and snow. They

are not meant for winter hills, but they come into their own on paths and pavements. MS. 0208 133 1177, www.yaktrax.co.uk **4. Lunch Jug (0.35L)**, Primus, £17, Tough, good looking and made to last. MS. 0131 228 9100, www.nordicoutdoor.co.uk **5. Union Half Zip fleece**, Craghoppers, £35. Seriously soft and superbly practical. Good value. MS. 0844 811 1022, www.craghoppers.com **6. Merino insoles**, Superfeet, £39.99. These can work wonders for stressed feet by offering extra support. Merino wool adds insulation. MS. 0800 012 1002, www.superfeet.co.uk **7. DownMat Lite**

5M Exped, £94.95. If you're camping in winter, it's essential to put good insulation between you and the ground. This down-filled mat is compact and comfortable. MS. 015396 24040 or see www.lyon.co.uk/outdoor/exped-stockists **8. Lugano Lace High Waterproof Boots**, Patagonia, £155. These cosy, grippy boots have a snow-sole and are waterproof enough to cross icy streams. Good enough to climb mountains in. JB. 0800 026 0055, www.patagonia.com **9. WarmWool Polo w/ zip**, SAclima, £69.95. This 100% merino wool baselayer delivers superb insulation



9



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15

and incredible comfort. MS. 0131 228 9100, www.nordicoutdoor.co.uk **10. Monkstone Socks**, £15. Knitted with Pembrokeshire wool, these walking socks are sturdy and warm. JB. www.monkstoneknitwear.co.uk **11. Rimjhim Hat**, Sherpa, £25. This incredibly snug wool hat has a Polarfleece lining. MS. 01572 772505, www.sherpaadventuregear.co.uk **12. Thermal Fleece Liner Gloves**, Subzero, £18. Wear under your mitts. JB. 0116 2402634, www.subzerostore.co.uk **13. Sioux 400 Sleeping Bag**, £65. Soft fabric; should be comfortable down to 6°C. JB. www.vaude.com **14. Torres Overlayering**

Trousers, Páramo £110. Windproof, breathable and waterproof. Full-length zips allow you to pull them on quickly. JB. www.paramo.co.uk, 01892 786444 **15. Eddy Base Layer** £45, Leggings £40, Finisterre. This merino base layer is soft and warm; on a brisk hike the fabric moves sweat away from your skin effectively. JB. 01872 554 481, www.finisterreuk.com



Kit reviews in detail

Find out more about all the products on this page – and more great cold weather kit ideas too – at www.countryfile.com

Team test: warm jackets

Sherpa jacket

Keela, £79.99

Thermal jackets like this are ideal if you stop on a cold day. This one comes with removable arms so you can save weight by carrying a gilet rather than full jacket. It's wind and water resistant, packs down well, though the pockets let the design down.

Matt Swaine. 01592 777000, www.keela.co.uk



Melker parka

Didriksons, £220

Parkas give excellent all-round protection in nasty winter weather. This Swedish coat is waterproof, windproof, long and well insulated – and there's plenty of room for layers underneath on freezing cold days.

Joe Pontin. 01275 390451, www.didriksons.com



Nightfall jacket

Rohan, £245

If you haven't tried a good down jacket, you won't believe that something so insubstantial and airy can keep you so warm in cold, windy weather. Stuffed with goose down – a by-product of the food industry – this is light and snug. It's not waterproof but it does have a shower-repellent finish. Julie Brominicks 0800 840 1411, www.rohan.co.uk



• **READ MORE** about down jackets in our test at www.countryfile.com

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1



Lakelovers offer a selection of self-catering holiday cottages located in the heart of the stunning Lake District, considered one of the most beautiful destinations in the UK. We offer 3-5 star holiday cottages ranging from sleeps 2, right up to sleeps 20. We also offer short breaks and pets are welcome at many of our cottages. To request your free brochure, call the number provided.

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2



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☎ 01726 832965
info@estuarycottages.co.uk
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12



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FBM HOLIDAYS

11



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www.fbmholidays.co.uk

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MIDDLEWICK HOLIDAY COTTAGES

10



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www.themiddlewick.co.uk

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Early Bird BOOKINGS

Book your 2015 holidays now and take advantage of these 'Early Bird' special offers. Don't forget to quote the reference when booking and claim your exclusive deals.

1 LAKELOVERS
The Lake District

2 ESTUARY COTTAGES
Cornwall

3 MYLOR HARBOURSIDE
HOLIDAYS Cornwall

4 THE GOOD LIFE COTTAGE
COMPANY The Lake District

5 HOTEL BOAT KAILANI
Windsor, Berkshire

6 COASTAL LODGES AT
GARA MILL South Devon

7 UPTON GRANGE COUNTRY
ESTATE Ringstead, Dorset

8 HOTEL BOAT TRANQUIL
ROSE Thames & Chilterns

9 CWM SHON
COTTAGES Wales

10 MIDDLEWICK HOLIDAY
COTTAGES Somerset

11 FBM HOLIDAYS
Tenby, Wales

12 THE CHARLES
BATHURST INN Yorkshire

CWM SHON COTTAGES WALES

9



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www.thegoodlifecottageco.co.uk

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enquiries@coastallodges.co.uk
www.coastallodges.co.uk

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This map is for illustrative purposes only and is not intended to represent definitive scale and detail.

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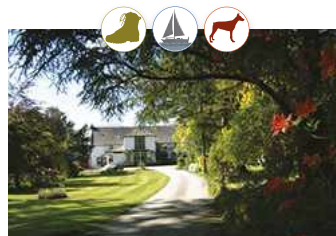
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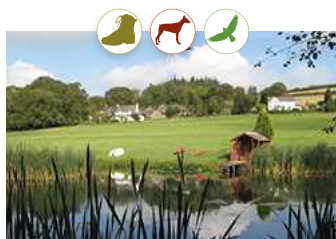
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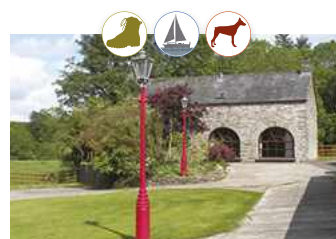
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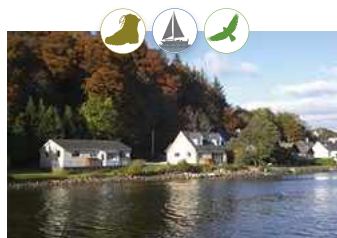
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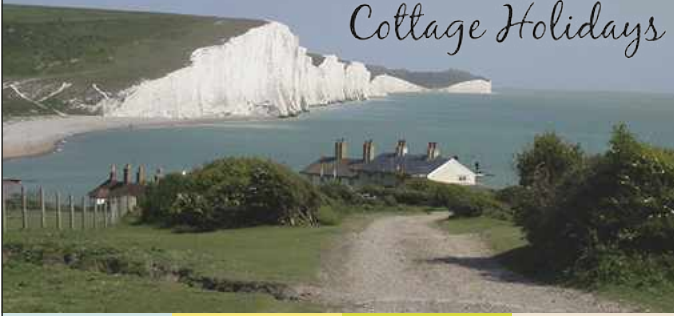
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my countryside

Kurt Jackson

Raw nature, cliffs, choughs, peregrine falcons and moths... landscape painter Kurt Jackson discusses the wild sights that inspire his work

I think I have always been a rural person at heart, from a childhood wandering the countryside of Hertfordshire and Cornwall,

looking at and learning about British wildlife and the great outdoors and how everything ticks. Now as an artist primarily concerned with the natural world, I spend my days absorbed and involved with the detail and substance of the fauna and flora (and us) and the lie of the land, attempting to capture and celebrate it in my paintings.

I live in the far west of Cornwall so the majority of my works involve the immediate

– the land and environment that surrounds me. However I travel upcountry for my subject matter as well. I need to have some connection or a reason to spend time in a place that I paint – so it might be a memory or family interaction, or a wish to discover a specific animal, plant or habitat for myself. Through painting I become close to a locality – understanding and appreciating it. The paintings might follow a route: a river's journey, a prehistoric trackway, a footpath.

These last few years I have been travelling and painting throughout Britain for my latest project *Place*, resulting in a book and a touring exhibition that launched in November. As a result I have been reacquainted with the diversity and beauty of this country.

Here in West Cornwall I have been working on the nearest stretch of cliff to me – about 10 fields from my door.

It is a post-industrial landscape, and has reverted to somewhere dominated by the elements – the wild Atlantic and nature in the raw. It's a paradise. Here the choughs and peregrines rule, and a million wild flowers carpet the granite soil on the cliff.

I feel both town and country have potential from an artistic point of view but the country is where I feel most relaxed – where I don't have to look over my shoulder when I am working, where the distraction is the shield bug crawling



“The paintings might follow a route: a river's journey, a prehistoric trackway”

KURT JACKSON EXHIBITIONS:

Place runs until 7 March at Southampton City Art Gallery. See our December issue for samples of his work from this solo exhibition. *River*, a retrospective of Jackson's river projects, runs until 25 January at the Horniman Museum, London. *Line Caught and Local*, a solo show based on Cornish fisheries, is on until 25 January at the National Maritime Museum, Falmouth.

across the canvas rather than a curious bystander. Every year I paint as the artist in resident at Glastonbury Festival – is that town or country?

I think the greatest challenges facing the countryside are a combination of rising population, food sources, housing pressures and climate change. All exert demands on our precious rural areas.

My work can start in situ outdoors and finish in the studio or vice versa, or be wholly made in the studio, or wholly made outdoors. I try to vary my working practice as much as possible to keep it fresh and dynamic. Essentially I immerse myself in the natural world with an eye for detail and composition, with the locality depending on the project.

The environment gets involved with the making, there's a certain amount of serendipity, the elements may add or detract, the paint comes and goes. Whether I take a massive canvas out or just a piece of paper, plein-air painting is always a battle, but that's when the best work happens.

Yesterday I had two choughs flirting – tumbling and screeching above me on the cliff – charmingly acrobatic and comical. But often it's the mundane I delight in, the ordinary and often ignored, like the moth on the window pane. I made a BBC documentary last year about moths and became fascinated with noctuids with their poetic Victorian names. Beautiful to draw as well.

My rural heroes are the Wildlife Trusts – Cornwall Wildlife Trust specifically of course. I approve of all their work with local communities. The Bumble bee Conservation Trust has my vote, as does the Butterfly Conservation group.

I want my work to be appreciated and noticed. Ideally I want my work to reflect the beauty and diversity of the natural world. I need my work to both be accessible to the general public and also to be taken seriously by the art establishment. To be non elitist.

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